



CHRISTIE WAS SEWING.

CHRISTIE'S CHRISTMAS

BY

PANSY

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"Hall in the Grove," "A new Graft on the
Family Tree," "Tip Lewis and
His Lamp," etc., etc., etc.*

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CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST JOURNEY.



That began, like most Christmas days, a long while beforehand. That is, the getting ready for it began. The truth is, it was one very warm day in August that the plans for Christie's Christmas were formed. They were all out under the great elm-tree in the back yard, at work trying to keep cool; so Karl said, who had his torn straw hat for a fan, and was lying at full length under the tree. Christie was sewing, taking quick little business-like stitches on a long seam, the baby was pulling first at her work, and then at Karl's hat; Nettle was under the tree too, but fast asleep, one chubby hand supporting her red cheek. The mother of all these little Tuckers was there too,

sewing another long seam. There was ever so much to do in the Tucker family, and when any of them sat down to rest, there was sure to be long seams to sew, patches to set, or holes to darn.

"Karl," the mother said, "keep the flies off of Nettie, can't you? they are eating her up."

"I must go," said Karl, but he arose on one elbow and began lazily to fan away the flies; "I guess my half-hour is up; father said I was to rest for half an hour, because my cheeks got so red, he was afraid I would be sun-struck; it is awful hot out in the field. I'll tell you where I wish I was this minute; I'd like to be in uncle Daniel's ice house. What a thing it must be to have ice houses and everything you want."

"We can have an ice house just as well as not, by Christmas time," said Christie, biting off her thread; "if I had a chance to be at uncle Daniel's a little while, I'd take care to see something different from ice houses—something that we can't *ever* have." As she spoke, she drew a long breath, like one whose heart was full of things that she might say, if she would. Karl watched her curiously from behind his hat.



"What things are there at uncle Daniel's that you never expect to have?" he asked at last.

"Lots of them; carpets, and nice furniture, and pictures, and books, and a piano, oh my!" She caught her breath again, and seemed to think it best to stop, lest she should say too much.

"I wouldn't care a fig for the carpets and furniture, but I'd like well enough to have some of the books. A history or two, maybe, and like enough a physical geography; but those things I mean to have some day, without going to uncle Daniel's. What good would it do to look at things, if you didn't own them?"

"I think it would be nice to have one good look at them all; you could think out how other folks live a great deal easier after that."

"Well," said Karl, after a thoughtful pause, "maybe you will have a chance some day; it isn't so awful far to uncle Daniel's, now that the railroad is done. How do you know but you will go and make them a visit?"

Over this wild suggestion, Christie laughed, and broke her thread in her nervousness; but the mother looked up with a significant nod of her head. "I mean you shall, child," she said

decidedly; "I meant it for a surprise, but maybe you will like thinking it over, and planning for it, better than the surprise. Your father and I made up our minds that we would have you go and spend a whole day at your uncle Daniel's, and see all the things that you want to see so much; they've invited us often enough, and we mean to do it."

Karl sat upright, and his cheeks were nearly as red as Christie's, and both the children said "When?" in such loud, eager tones, that the baby immediately said it after them, and then sat down on the grass and laughed immoderately at his own smartness. As he had never said this word before, Christie, even in her excitement, had to bend down and kiss the baby's mouth.

"Well," said Mrs. Tucker, speaking slowly and impressively, "if nothing more than we know of now, happens, we have decided that you shall spend the whole of Christmas day at your uncle's. You are to go up on the train that passes at seven in the morning, and come back on the six o'clock, and that will give you nine whole hours at your uncle Daniel's. I'm sure that will give you time to see a good

many things. I don't know what your father will say to my telling you of it, but you do like to dream out things so well, I thought you might like to dream over that."

"Oh my!" said Christie; her work fell at her feet in a heap, and baby seized it and rolled over on it, and chuckled. Then Christie said "Oh my!" again, this time at baby, and added, "you will scratch yourself on that needle," and stooped and gathered up her work. The mother went on with her wonderful story.

"We've been thinking about it for a good while, your father and I, but it was only last night that we made our minds up squarely that you should go, if we could bring it about, and I guess we can. I wish it was so that you and Karl could go together, but we don't know how to manage that now, that's a fact; and Christmas day is Christie's birthday, you know, Karl, and besides she is two years older than you. Her turn ought to come first."

"Course," said Karl sturdily, but he shaded his face entirely with his hat, and let the flies bite Nettie in peace for about a minute. What a thing it would be to take a ride on the steam cars! No, he had never been on them in his

life. Neither had Christie, but then she was a girl; he wondered if it could be so hard for girls as for boys.

"But mother," said Christie timidly, "it costs an awful lot of money to ride on the cars."

"I know it does. Eighty-five cents there, and eighty-five cents back; that's a dollar and seventy cents! It seems a good deal to spend; but it is your birthday, and it is Christmas day, and you've worked hard, and father and Karl and I think you ought to go; don't we, Karl?"

"Yes'm," said Karl, and if his voice trembled a little, his mother pretended not to notice it.

"Yes," she said cheerily, "that's what we do, and we are going to work for it; there is a great deal to be done between now and then; there's some yeast cakes I will want to send to your aunt Louisa; and some mittens for the baby, and if I can bring it about, I'm going to tie a comfort for his little bed; your aunt Louisa said they were nice things, the last time she was here, and your father thinks there will be a bag of choice apples that we can put in for them; and I thought maybe Karl and you would want to gather a few nuts for your cousins; then they



"I MUST GO," SAID KARL.

ought to have mittens, too, or something, but I don't know as we can manage about so much yarn; dear me! there is a great deal to do, and only a little time to do it in; not quite four months, I declare! How time does go, to be sure."

Then did Christie and Karl look at each other; glances full of curious astonishment. Nothing seemed to them to move so slowly as time. It seemed to Christie that Christmas day would *never* come, never in the world!

But it did. And it found the Tucker family up very early in the morning. A kerosene lamp was burning in every room in the lower part of the house, by four o'clock. For wasn't the station a mile away, and wasn't Christie to take her first ride on the cars that morning? How pretty she looked in her trim new suit! New? Well, yes, new to her. Who was going to know, unless she told them, that the brown travelling dress, sack and all, was made from an old waterproof cloak that aunt Louisa had left there one day because it really was not worth bothering to get it into the trunk? Aunt Louisa herself would not have recognized it now. It had been turned, and sponged and pressed, and cut and

fitted and trimmed, with rows upon rows of machine stitching of the very neatest sort. How many fingers had helped to get Christie ready for her first going out into the great world! There was Susan Briggs the tailoress, home on a few days' visit to her mother, their next neighbor, and one evening when she ran in to see the Tuckers, she had said: "Why, you would have enough of that for one of those cunning little cut-away jackets that they wear so much! Let me look at it: I do believe I could get one out. Why, dear me! it has a large cape too; yes, I know I could. Shall I cut it out for you, Mrs. Tucker? Oh nonsense! I would just as soon do it as to sit here with my hands folded. Hand me the shears, Christie! I've got my pattern in my pocket; I lent it to Jane Ann Wheeler, and I met her coming to bring it home, just as I turned the corner to-night. Wasn't that fortunate? I'll tell you what it is, Christie Tucker, we'll have a nice little cut-away jacket for you before you know it. What are you going to trim the dress with?"

"Oh dear me!" said Mrs. Tucker, "don't talk to us about trimming; it has been just as much as we could do to pucker the necessary

things together to make the dress. You see, Susan, a journey makes so many expenses; she had to have a pair of gloves, and a new pair of shoes, and altogether it counts up; she will have to go without trimming."

Then did Susan sit in quiet, her busy shears snipping the cloth most skilfully, her busy brain considering the while; at last she spoke her thoughts.

"I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Tucker, this goods would look beautifully stitched on the machine; suppose we change works! if you will do some buttonholes for me, I'll take this home and give it three rows on mother's machine; you do make buttonholes elegantly, and I'd rather stitch, any day, than to make them."

And the gratified mother who would not have accepted charity to get trimming for her daughter, was nevertheless willing to get it by changing work; so the three rows of stitching were added, and very pretty they looked. Then, one evening, came Mrs. Briggs, Susan's mother, to sit awhile with her knitting, and tucked away in her pocket was a pretty little ruffle of finest cambric, hemmed with the smallest of stitches, gathered in infinitesimal puckers, and carefully

fluted by Mrs. Briggs own skilful hands.

"There!" she said, bringing it out, "I was making ruffles for my girls, and there was a little speck over — I promised them three apiece, you know, and this was left over—and thinks I to myself, that will just make Christie a ruffle to wear when she goes her first journey; so I made it for a little Christmas present for you, child; and you must pay me by telling me about all the wonderful things you saw on the way."

How pretty the little white ruffle was! And how pleased was Christie, and how more than pleased was her mother. It was so nice for people to take an interest in her Christie.

At last everything was ready. The basket of choice apples was packed, the bag of yeast cakes was stowed away in the old-fashioned, flowered carpet satchel that used to go on journeys by water, and journeys by stage, a long time ago, but had never in its life taken a ride by steam. There were other choice things in the satchel—mittens and wrist warmers, and the gay patch-work comfort for the baby's bed; and there was another basket for the nuts that had been gathered at just the right time to be at their best.



SUSAN BRIGGS AND HER MOTHER.

"I don't know how you will ever get out of the cars, loaded down so," father Tucker said, looking a little anxious, "but I guess the conductor will help you; I'll speak to him about it."

"And do be careful, Christie," said mother Tucker; "it seems to me as though the cars must be dangerous things, going so fast. I'm most sorry I gave my consent to having you go off alone; it is a pretty risky thing for a young girl like you."

"O mother," said Karl, "nothing will hurt her. I wouldn't be afraid to go to New York all alone."

"Yes, I know," said the wise little mother, regarding him with kind motherly eyes; "but then, you are a boy, and boys are expected to take care of themselves, and look after the girls besides."

Karl's dark cheeks flushed over this, and he answered cheerily, "Well, I'll take good care of her; I'll go on the cars and pick her out a seat, and settle all her baskets and bundles."

If the whole truth were told, Karl Tucker looked forward to this performance almost as eagerly as Christie did to the journey. Every

morning he drove to the depot and sent a can of milk into the city by the early train. And every morning Wells Burton, a boy only three or four years older than himself, was there with his sleigh and pony to see his sister off to school. Karl, after his milk can was disposed of, on the hand freight car, had leisure to watch Wells Burton. How he took his sister's satchel of books, and her shawl strap, and walked beside her to the steps of the car and helped her up, and sprang gayly in after her; then Karl could see him through the windows, walking down the aisle of the car, sometimes turning a seat, then settling the books and the shawl strap on some shelf or hook that seemed to be overhead; Karl had never been near enough to investigate how it was fixed, for his strict orders were on no account to step on the cars. But he had watched Wells Burton all through the fall; he knew just how to do it, and he was burning with an eager desire to do it for Christie. Great, then, was his disappointment when his father appeared in his best boots, and with his great coat and heavy mittens.

"You will have two passengers, my boy, this

morning," he said cheerily; "oh yes, I'm going. I couldn't let my girl start out into the world alone."

"Now do be careful," said mother, following her treasure out of the door, and down the snowy path to the great wood sleigh, where the can of milk was already tucked in among bags and blankets; "don't open the window to look at anything, and mind and don't put your head out; I've heard that it is dangerous; and remember all I told you to tell Louisa and the rest; and mind and wrap the big shawl around you well when you ride to the station. And don't you let them coax you to stay all night for anything in the world. I shouldn't sleep a wink if you did, and I guess maybe I'd start on foot to see what was the matter."

Between these sentences, Christie was being kissed and hugged, until what with the bundling up, and the frosty air, and a feeling as though she was going away off into a great cold world, and might never see any of the dear people in the little old farmhouse any more, she felt as though she should choke, or maybe cry; and that would be almost worse!

At last they were off! The mother came in and held the baby up at the window to watch the sleigh as it turned the corner and slipped out of sight, and then she said:

"How Mrs. Burton stands it to let her girl go to the city every day to school, I *don't* see! Seems to me I should fly away with anxiety; but there is nothing like getting used to things. Dear me! It doesn't seem right to have the child go off on Christmas day; but then it was her birthday, and all; and she'll be back to supper, and be hungry enough, I'll warrant; there'll be so many dishes, and silver, and things at Daniel's, that she can't do much eating. I'll have stewed chicken, and biscuits smothered in cream gravy, and hot apple sauce, to surprise her; see if I don't! Come, Nettie dear, you're the only little girl mother has to help her to-day, and we must fly around. What I should do if I hadn't Christie to help every day, is more than I can think. And, thank the Lord, I haven't *got* to think."

But she wiped away the tears as she hurried to work, for Christie had never been away from home before a whole day in her life. What, not even to school? No, not even to

school. It is time I told you a little more about the Tucker family. They lived away "out West." That is, if you live in New York, or Brooklyn, or Maine, or Boston, or New Haven, or even in Cleveland or Cincinnati, you might call it away "out West," for it was in Kansas.

The Tuckers went there from New England when Karl was a baby, and had been working away on their bit of a farm ever since. A city had grown up about twenty miles from them, but it had not grown where Mr. Tucker thought it would, when he bought his little farm, and not even a school had come within five miles of them until lately. I am not so very sure that it would have done the Tucker children much good if there had; the truth was, there was such hard work, and so much of it, to feed all the mouths, and clothe the stout little bodies, that both Christie and Karl had had to work hard all day long. You need not suppose that on this account they did not know anything. I fancy they were almost as good scholars as some who go to school year after year. Mr. Tucker had taught them, in the long winter evenings, to cipher, and had studied geography with them

on a big old map of the United States, that he had brought with him from New England. And Mrs. Tucker, who in her New England home had been the best reader and speller in the whole school, had taught them in both these branches very carefully. And so, though they had not many books to read, what they had were very carefully read, and very well understood.

Uncle Daniel lived in the handsome city that had sprung up twenty miles further east, and he lived an entirely different life from the Tuckers. He was Mrs. Tucker's youngest brother, was a merchant, and had one of the finest stores in the fine little city, and was what the Western people called a rich man. The Tuckers saw very little of them, for the reason that twenty miles in a country where there are no railroads, are not easily gotten over, especially by busy people; and it was not yet quite a year since the branch railroad came within a mile of the Tucker's farm. Since then, the country around had begun to hold up its head. A good school had been started, a neat little church had been built, and to the church the Tuckers tramped every Sabbath day. But the school

they had not succeeded in getting time to attend.

“By next year,” Mr. Tucker had said, “we must try hard for it.”

He said it again that very morning, on the road to the depot.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CARS.

IT was very pleasant riding to the depot in the early light of the winter morning. A ride of any sort was a treat to Christie. There was always so much to do in the little home in the morning, and when evening was closing in, that she could rarely be spared to ride to the station with Karl; so that really for the third time in her life did she expect to gaze on the cars!

"It isn't your first ride after the iron horse, by any means," her father said to her. "More than a thousand miles you rode, and you stood it well, too; were just as good as you could be, and gave mother and me no trouble at all; in fact you seemed to be anxious to amuse Karl, and help him to have a good time. But you were such a little dot I don't suppose you remember anything about it."

"Why, father," said Karl, "she *wasn't* three years old then! How could she remember it?"

"Well, I don't know; seems to me I remember my mother, and I *wasn't* quite three years old when she died; but then folks remember mothers I s'pose, longer than they do anything else. They ought to. Well, Christie, my girl, keep your eyes open to-day, and see what you can learn. My father used to tell me — your old grandfather, you know, who died before you were born — he used to say to me, 'Learn all you can, John, about anything and everything; there is no telling when a chance may pop up for you to use what you thought you never *would* use.' It's a good rule. I practised on it once when I saw a man making a wagon; I watched just how he fixed the wheel and the holes for the nails, and everything, and I said, right out loud, 'It isn't any ways likely that I shall ever make a wagon, but then I might as well know how you do it.' And it *wasn't* a week after that we broke down going across the prairie, your mother and me and two children; and if I hadn't known just how to fix that wheel we would have frozen to death likely enough before we could get anywhere."

"Well," Christie said, laughing a little, "I don't suppose I shall ever make a train of cars, but I'll learn how if I can."

"There's no telling," her father said, "what will come of one day; they are curious things, days are; like enough you may see something to-day that will help you along all your life; and for the matter of that, you might see plenty of things to hinder you all your life; that's what makes such solemn business of living. Only there's one comfort; you can shut your eyes to the evil things, and say: I won't remember one of them; I'll have nothing to do with them. And the good things you can mark and lay away in your mind for future use. Well, here we are, I declare. Old Sam has trotted along pretty fast this morning. Now, my man, you may help Christie out, and get her ticket, and put her on the train all right, and I'll stay here and take care of Sam."

Then did Karl's face glow! But he made a pretense of objection: "Why, father, I can take care of Sam if you want to go."

"No, no, my boy, I can trust you to look after Christie; you'll have plenty of time; they've got a lot of freight to load this morn-



KARL SWUNG OFF AMONG THE BOUGHS.

ing, and you can go in and find her a seat, and do it all up like a man. Sam and I will tend to each other out here. I'll just set the satchel on the steps there, so you can reach it easy, and then I'll drive around to the shed."

Good, thoughtful father! Putting quietly away his own desire to see his little girl safely launched for her first journey; putting back with resolute hand the vague fear that Karl might not help her properly, or might not get off the train in time, and so harm might come to one or both of them. Well he knew that a whole army of "mights" and "might nots" lay all along life's journey with which to make himself miserable, and there was nothing for it but to seize the doubts with resolute hand and hold them back so that they need not cripple the young lives under his care. He remembered how, when Karl climbed the tree and swung off in a daring way among the slender-looking boughs, he had to shut his eyes and ask God to take care of the boy, and keep the father from crying out, and so help to make his son a coward. He felt a little bit like that this morning. Only the memory of the apple-tree helped; there were no trees now that Karl couldn't

climb. They moved away briskly, that little man and woman; Christie running back once to give father one more kiss, and to assure him that she would certainly be in time for the evening train. And once he called after her, and ran forward to tell her to say to uncle Daniel that he could have a cow in the spring, like the one he wanted last fall. And then he went back to his horse, and the boy and girl entered the depot together. Karl went forward, business written on every line of his manly face as he called and paid for a ticket, and stood by protectingly while Christie pinned it in the corner of her handkerchief, and then pinned the handkerchief into her pocket. Then he made a little heap of the basket of apples, and the basket of nuts, and the flowered satchel and the shawl, making business-like comments the while.

“You must have the conductor lift off these baskets for you, Christie; they always do that for folks travelling alone. You don’t have to give up your ticket, you know; the conductor makes a little hole in it, and then gives it back; he won’t take it until you are almost at the city. And Christie, mother said I was to remind you the last thing, not to get off the cars until you

saw uncle Daniel, and knocked on the window for him to come for you; mother worried about your getting off alone."

"And what," said Christie, "should I do if uncle Daniel didn't get there in time, and I had to get off?" She moved closely to Karl as she spoke, and felt as though their ages were reversed, and she were ten and he was twelve, and wished with all her timid little heart that he was going along to take care of her. He had seen the cars so often.

"Oh, well," her protector said reassuringly, "he will be there, of course; he knows just how mother feels. But then if he shouldn't, you needn't be one mite afraid; it is just as easy to step off. I shouldn't mind it at all. I've seen Wells Burton swing himself off with his hands in his pockets; he does it just as easy as you step down from the back stoop. There he is now! Look, Christie, the boy just turning the corner!"

He came leisurely down the snowy walk, whistling a merry tune; a tall, handsome boy, dressed in a well-fitting suit of finest quality and of city make. He nodded his head good-humoredly to a man who stood leaning against

the post, and lifted his cap politely to a lady who was approaching from the other end.

"I wonder what he is going in for to-day?" murmured Karl, watching him with fascinated gaze. There isn't any school for a week; I heard him tell Mr. Lewis so yesterday. Do you suppose he can be going just for the fun of it?"

There was a touch of awe in Karl's voice. It seemed such a wonderful thing for a boy but a few years older than himself to be possibly riding around on the cars *for the fun of it*, as he sometimes rode a horse to water! As if in explanation of his wonderment, Wells Burton spoke to the lady who had addressed him.

"No, ma'am, our people are all in town; went in yesterday to spend Christmas at my grandfather's. I was to have gone there last evening but I didn't get my papa's message in time, and so came home as usual and had to stay here all night.

"Well, no, not alone exactly. The servants are all at home, you know; but it seemed rather lonely.

"Oh, no, they were not frightened. I telegraphed of course as soon as I found out how it was. I thought mamma might be a trifle worried.

"No, ma'am, I walked down this morning, it is such a bore to be always riding. Since there was nobody but myself I thought I would have the fun of a walk in the snow."

What wonderful talk was this! Karl, looking and listening, forgot for the moment his own importance that morning, and actually gave a sigh. To hear a boy so little older than himself talk so composedly about going in town, and out of town, and spending the night alone, and telegraphing, and dismissing the handsome sleigh and ponies for the fun of a walk, it was almost too much! He looked over at the handsome, well-dressed fellow with a strange wistfulness; and the gray patches on his knees looked larger and coarser than ever before, and the red tippet around his neck seemed almost to choke him. What a difference there was in their lives, to be sure!

"Talk about houses," he said to Christie, speaking some of his thoughts aloud, "you ought to see the inside of their house! I guess uncle Daniel's is nothing to it. Nick Barton has been there with freight; been up-stairs in three or four of their rooms, carrying heavy things, you know, and he says it is perfectly

splendid, the furniture and everything. He was telling me about it last night; he says they've got two pianos, or two great big music things in different rooms, and books! Nick says there are books enough to fill the church, he should think."

"I'd like to see the outside of their house," Christie said wistfully. "I don't ever expect to see the inside. But Karl, in the summer, mother said you and I would walk over that way and see all around it. Do you suppose they will be there in the summer?"

"Of course," said Karl, "they built the new house for the summer. They didn't mean to stay here in the winter at all. Nick told me last night; he says they just came down to settle it, and see to things; and the sick young man took a fancy to stay; so they all stayed. Nick said he didn't think it would last long, but he guessed maybe they would stay all winter."

"Is there a sick young man?"

Christie's voice was changing from wistfulness to pity.

"Yes, there is; he can't walk, only on crutches, and looks pale and weak; and when he goes into the city, Nick says some great

strong man takes him right in his arms and lifts him into the cars ; and he is twenty years old."

"Poor young man !" said Christie.

And she envied the Burton family no more.

"There's the train !" said Karl, his voice full of suppressed excitement. "Now, Christie, don't you touch one of those bundles. I'll tend to them all ; and, Christie," — this in a lower tone — "if anything should happen that uncle Daniel *shouldn't* be there, and you shouldn't see the conductor, this boy would help you off if you should just ask him, and he could tell you just where to go to wait ; he knows all about the city, you see."

"Oh," said Christie, shrinking back, and clinging to Karl's tippet, "I couldn't speak to him, Karl ; I couldn't indeed. I'd rather get off alone a great deal ; and I'm most sure uncle Daniel will be there."

"So am I. Don't worry ! Now come !"

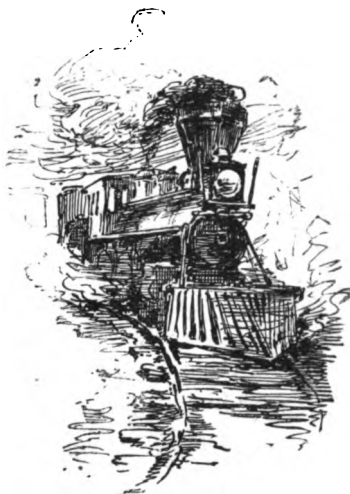
And the great moment had arrived. Karl shouldered the bundles with the air of one used to carrying many things, set them skilfully on the steps of the platform, then came down again for Christie, piloted her safely through the car, found a seat for her, discovered that there was a

convenient little wire house above the seat where shawls and parcels were placed, arranged hers for her, and in fact did everything that an experienced traveller could have done for her comfort. He had not used his eyes for nothing. But now a brakeman was shouting "All aboard!" and he must leave her to herself. He bent down for one last word just as Wells Burton sauntered in with the air of an old traveller who had lingered outside until the latest moment:

"Remember, Christie, if anything *should* happen — which there won't, it isn't likely — I shouldn't be afraid to ask that boy about things; he looks good-natured. And, Christie, mind and come home to-night, even if you have to walk."

There was a sudden clanging of bell, a final howl from the locomotive, a jerk which almost threw Christie from her seat, and they were really off. How swiftly the trees and barns and fences flew past them! Everything seemed to be afraid of them, and hurrying to get out of their way. What a queer noise the cars made! And they shook so! As though they were angry, Christie thought. She and Karl had often tried to imagine what riding on the cars felt like, but they certainly had never succeeded.

By degrees, as she became accustomed to the strange motion, our little traveller gained courage to look about her. She had a great



THERE'S THE TRAIN !

desire to act like other people, and in order to do this, it would be necessary to find out how other people acted. Opposite her sat a man with gray hair, and gold spectacles, and a very large gold watch. Christie liked to look at him.

"He is good," she said to herself. "I know he is. I wonder if he's somebody's

grandpa going home for Christmas. I suppose he doesn't look like my grandpa out in New York, but I wish he did. I suppose he is taking his grandchildren some nice presents; books, maybe. I wish he would come over here and sit, and tell me about them."

This thought made her look directly in front of her, to see who had the seat which she wanted for her old gentleman. It was a young man with a pale, discontented face. He seemed to be in a great hurry, for he looked at his watch three times during the few minutes that Christie watched him; yet when a lady who sat in front of him suddenly turned and asked him to please tell her what time it was, he started as though he were not used to being spoken to, and said: "What? I beg your pardon. Oh, the time! I really do not know, but I'll see." And out came the watch again.

How could Christie help giggling? It did seem so funny to her. She did not mean he should hear her, but he did, for he darted at her a quick annoyed look, which, however, softened when he saw what a shy, ashamed little thing it was.



THEY WERE REALLY OFF

Now Christie was not used to strangers, and felt almost afraid to speak; but she had been brought up to be careful of other people's feelings, and she was afraid she had hurt this young man. She slipped forward on her seat and touched his arm. Her voice trembled a little:

"If you please, sir," she said, "I hope you will forgive me for laughing. I couldn't help it; it seemed so funny to look at such a lovely watch as that without knowing what it said. But I did not mean to be rude. Mother would be ashamed of me."

If the young man had been bewildered when the lady spoke to him, he was too much astonished now to say a word. He just stared for a minute at the burning cheeks, as though he felt like saying:

"What in the world can you be talking about?" At last he spoke.

"There is no harm done, my little friend. I had already forgotten that you laughed. My thoughts were too busy about other things, and too sad to pay much attention to watches, or to think of anything but getting over the ground as fast as possible."

"We go very fast," said Christie earnestly.

She wanted to comfort the young man, his voice sounded so sad. He smiled faintly.

"Do you think so? It seems to me that we almost creep."

Christie caught her breath to keep from expressing too great surprise. It seemed to her that they almost flew.

He saw the astonishment on her face, and explained :

"A hundred miles from here I have a very sick friend. If I could get to her in time, I think I might help her. Do you wonder that the train seems to me to move very slowly?"

"No, sir ;" said Christie, with great sympathetic eyes. "If mother were sick, I should want to fly."

She sat back after that, and the young man took a telegram from his pocket, and seemed to study it. Then he took a newspaper, and seemed to others to be reading it; but Christie saw that part of the time it was upside down. She felt very sorry for him, and could not help glancing at him occasionally with a tender smile on her face; especially as he smiled back, and seemed to like her sympathy.

CHAPTER III.

PILING UP STORIES.

CHRISTIE had other travelling companions who interested her very much. At the first stopping-place a lady with a little fellow hardly out of babyhood came and took the seat just behind her. She had to twist herself around to get a view of the baby as he sat in a corner of the seat; but he was so pretty that she could hardly keep her eyes away from him. He had wonderful large blue eyes, and a laughing face, and he kept bobbing up and down, and making pretty little sounds out of his rosebud mouth, and once he smiled on her as though he hadn't the least objection in the world to being better acquainted. But Christie did not dare to go near him, for he was beautifully dressed, and his mamma looked as though she might be very particular about his friends. So the little girl who had left a baby at home, looked the other way and tried very hard to forget how

much she wanted to kiss the baby behind her.
The cars were quite full, but Christie thought



HARDLY OUT OF BABYHOOD.

that most of the people looked as though they
had been obliged to get up too early and had
not had a good breakfast.

"They feel cross," she said to herself, "or else they feel afraid. I wonder if there is anything to be afraid of."

Thinking which, she looked over at Wells Burton, the boy who went on the train every morning to the city. He surely ought to know by this time whether there was any cause for fear. He had his hands in his pockets, and was looking out of the window and whistling. He did not look in the least afraid, neither did he look cross.

What a thing it would be to know him, and have him tell about all the wonders that he saw in the city every day! He had been to the State House, she had heard, and Karl said the stage-driver said that the Governor was a friend of Mr. Burton, and had been out to see him.

How much Christie would like to hear something about the Governor from one who had actually heard him talk. She knew quite a good deal concerning this Governor. Her father admired him very much, and said he was one of the grandest temperance men in the State. And once when he went to the city to see about selling his corn, he had a story to tell

about having seen the Governor standing in the door of his home, and a fine-looking man her father said he was.

Christie had a burning desire to see a real governor ; or, failing in that — as of course she expected — to hear things about him : how he acted, and what he said, and all those nice pleasant things which she believed she could tell about people if she ever had any chances.

But she must not grumble on this morning of all others in her life, she told herself, letting the sober look go out of her face, and bringing back the happy one. Here were plenty of chances. What a long story she could tell Karl about these people on the cars. And there was that baby cooing and jumping, and — why, yes, the darling was actually throwing kisses at her.

The train stopped again. It was a very accommodating train ; it seemed to stop every few minutes to pick up passengers along the road when there was no station in sight. Some junction was yelled out, but the brakeman talked in Choctaw, and of course Christie did not understand him.

A gentleman came in, glanced up and down the well-filled car, then dropped into the seat

beside Christie. "I suppose you will let me sit with you?" he said.

His voice was very pleasant she thought, and his face was bright with smiles. Christie made haste to say, "Yes, sir." Then he began to talk with her, or rather to her, for Christie said very little. He pointed out a log cabin as they flew past it, and told her the queerest little history about its being built there by a boy less than sixteen years old, for his mother. And how he worked day and night, and earned money enough to send away to Maine for her, and how he supported her. And how they lived in a nice pleasant house, and had cows and horses, and the mother made butter, and sold it at the highest price in market, and how she said "It can't help but be good butter, I have such a dear good boy."

Christie listened and exclaimed and enjoyed. What a thing to tell father and mother and Karl! She felt that she was piling up stories to last all the rest of the winter evenings. She was very sorry when her pleasant friend arose at the very next station only a mile away, and bade her good-morning as politely as though she had been a grown-up lady. She wished

so much that she knew his name. It would be awkward to be always calling him "the gentleman with bright eyes that looked right through you." That seemed to be the only way she could describe him.

She noticed that he stopped at Wells Burton's seat and shook hands with him. It was quite likely that Wells knew who he was.

"Now, if I only knew Wells Burton," she told herself, "I might ask him; but then I don't, and it isn't likely that I ever shall."

The pretty baby had gone to sleep; she could not amuse herself with him, and so she turned to the window again just as they were passing a country road down which was flying a coach filled with a merry party, who realizing that the train was beating them, all swung their hats and cheered them on. That was fun for a little time, and then as they whizzed along, she spied a comical sight that entertained her still more. But as the on-flying train left all these interesting scenes in the rear, Christie at last thought of her father's advice, and she began to see if she could learn to make a car.

She twisted her head about, and looked up and down and around her in so many ways that

at last the sad-faced young man began to watch her. She was studying the long rope that ran through the top of the car, wondering what it was for, when he spoke to her.

"That rope is to be pulled to stop the train. If you should chance to want it stopped for any reason, all you would have to do would be to give that a violent pull; but I earnestly hope you won't do it, for it seems to me that we stop quite often enough."

"I am *sure* I won't," Christie said laughing a little, though really she felt somewhat startled over the bare idea of *her* stopping a train.

Not ten minutes after that it stopped again. What for? Nobody seemed to know. There was no station, not even so much as a shed; there was nobody to get on or off; yet there that ridiculous train stood, as though it had reached the end of its journey and did not care how soon the passengers hopped out in the snow. Then you should have heard the people grumble. Christie was astonished; she did not know that grown people were ever so cross. It made her laugh to see the watches bob out, while the faces which looked at them seemed to grow crosser every minute.

"What in the world are we stopping here for?" asked the pale-faced young man with such anxiety in his face that Christie felt very sorry for him. "What is the matter, sir?" This question he asked of a gentleman who had been out on the platform looking about him.

"Don't know, sir; can't find out. If the officials know they mean to keep it to themselves. Still, I guess we are going on soon; I saw signs of moving."

However, they did not move. The next person who thought it was his duty to attend to matters, was Wells Burton. How he happened to sit still for so long, I'm sure I don't know. He sauntered out and looked about him. Christie turned herself in her seat to get a view from the door. What a long level stretch of road lay behind them! How queerly the track looked! Two long black snakes surrounded on every side by snow. She wished she could get a nearer view. She had been charged not to step off the train, and on no account to put her head out of the window. But what was to hinder her stepping down to that closed door, and getting a nearer view of the snakes? She slipped quietly from her seat and went. It

looked fully as queer as she thought it would. Wells Burton stood on the lower step of the car, also gazing about him; not at the track, but at the train-men, who seemed to be trying to decide whether it was worth while to go on. Suddenly they concluded that they would.

The engine gave a snort to express its approval of the plan, several passengers who had been standing on the track jumped back again on the car, and came in to see about their seats. Then the wheels began to turn slowly around. Still Wells Burton stood on that lowest step with his hands in his pockets. Christie looked at him, and a little shiver ran through her while she thought if that were Karl she should surely be tempted to reach out and pull at his coat. How *could* the boy be so foolish? Why did not his mother make him promise not to do so?

He was coming in now; and it was quite time, for the train was well under way. How did it happen? Nobody knew. Wells Burton least of all; and Christie, who stood looking on all the while could never give a clear account of that part of it. She only knew that the boy she was watching with such anxiety, turned

carelessly on his heel, hands still in his pockets, and the next instant was lying a dreadful heap on the ground and the train was scudding on, and nobody but she, Christie Tucker, knew anything about it. She had just once thought in her mind — What if it were Karl? She gave one little squeal, which the engine swallowed, so that nobody heard, and the next second she did what made all the people in the car think that the quiet-faced, well-behaved little girl had suddenly gone crazy. She gave a quick little hop, very much as she had done many a time to reach the lowest bough of the apple-tree, and caught that rope whose use she had just learned, and never surely was harder pull given to it than her stout little body managed at that moment. In an instant the car was full of excitement. “What — what — what does that mean?” asked the fat man who had been the last to enter the train. The handsome old gentleman looked at her gravely through his gold spectacles, and the pale-faced man who had taught her about the rope said hastily: “Why, my child, you ought not to have done that. What in the world do you want?”

All this happened, of course, in a few sec-



ALL SWUNG THEIR HATS AND CHEERED.

onds; and before Christie could catch her frightened breath to explain, in came the conductor, looking like a summer thunder cloud. "What does all this mean?" he asked gruffly. "Who pulled that rope?"

Christie took time to be glad that the train was actually stopping, before she explained in a quick, frightened voice, "Oh, sir, he fell just as he was stepping on the train again, and he lies in the road. Do you think it killed him?"

"Who fell? What are you talking about?" said the conductor, his quick eye roving over the car in search of missing passengers. "Was it the boy who sat in that seat?" But before Christie could think of stammering out a "Yes, sir," he had turned from her and rushed out of the car, and the train which had almost stopped, began to move slowly backward. I'm sure you can imagine better than I can tell you how they all acted then. How they crowded around that end door, and all tried to see out from a space that would accommodate only two; and there was nothing to see! How they crowded around Christie, and asked questions? "How did it happen?" Christie did not know; she was still trembling over the thought

that it *had* happened. "What was he out there for?" Christie did not know. In her heart she believed it was because he was a very foolish boy; but that she did not like to say. "Was he hurt much?" Christie did not know; she wished very much that she did. "Is he your brother, my child?" This the handsome-faced old gentleman asked her.

"No, sir," said Christie; she knew so much, at least. Then she told who he was. "Ah, indeed!" the gentleman said. "A son of Warren H. Burton," he supposed. He had heard of him. Then there was a sudden bustle, and a scurrying to get out of the way, and a turning over of car seats to make a bed; for they were bringing the poor fellow in. Christie was relieved to find, as they passed her seat, that his eyes were wide open, and that though he looked very pale, he gazed about him like one who was curious to see what the people thought of all this, and seemed just a little vexed over their curiosity.

"Oh, no; he isn't badly hurt," the conductor said, as having fixed the boy into a seat, and made him as comfortable as possible, he came down the aisle on his way out. "He has a

sprained ankle that will shut him up for a few weeks, and a bruise or two; nothing serious, I think. How he escaped so easily is more than I can imagine. I thought of course he was killed. It is a bad habit, this standing on the car steps; I wonder his father doesn't forbid it."

"That is just what I wonder," thought Christie; and she ventured to glance in the direction of the turned seat. Wells Burton was looking right at her, and — why! was it possible that he was motioning to her? Her cheeks began to grow pink. What if she should walk over there to him, and he should stare at her and say, "What do *you* want, little girl?" and it should turn out that he had not thought of such a thing as motioning to her. If anything of this kind should happen, Christie felt that she must certainly sink through the floor. But he kept looking at her, and she felt almost sure that he was nodding his head at her. Poor Christie! It had not begun to take so much courage to pull that bell rope, as it did to think of walking down the aisle and stopping to see if that boy possibly wanted her. In fact, she had pulled the bell without thinking about

it at all; but this was different; and her cheeks began to grow very hot, and she wondered whether mother would be ashamed of her for going, or for not going. What would all the passengers think of her for marching down there to talk to a boy whom she had told them she never spoke to in her life? "I *won't* go," she told herself; "not a step. Why would he be motioning to me? Of course he isn't."

And having settled this to her satisfaction, what did Christie do in the course of the next two minutes, but walk meekly down that aisle, and stand before the turned seats.

"I thought you motioned to me," she said gently. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"I should say you had done considerable in that line already," he answered heartily. "How came you to think of anything so sensible as stopping the train? Most any girl I know would have yelled like a screech-owl, and danced up and down a few times, and then finished up by fainting dead away, before anybody had found out what was the matter. How came you to act so differently from the usual style?"



SHE SPIED A COMICAL SIGHT.

"I didn't know that was the way to do," Christie said, a little glimmer of a laugh in her gray eyes. "Are you much hurt?"

"Not so very. My ankle is sprained, they say, and I feel somewhat as though I was a hundred and fifty years old, and had enjoyed the rheumatism for about half a century. Sit down here, and let us talk about it." So Christie sat down on the extreme edge of the farther seat.

"I wish I could do something to help the pain," she said. "If your ankle is broken, it ought to be set, and I almost think that the man who sits in the seat right before mine, is a doctor."

"The ankle will keep until we get to the city. We are half-way there by this time, though we seem to have plenty of hindrances this morning. I say, how many trains of cars have you stopped in your life?"

"I never did such a thing before," Christie said, her eyes dancing now, "and I had just promised that I wouldn't stop this one; but you see there wasn't anything else to do."

"Well, I'll tell you what I think: I think it was about as plucky a thing to do as I ever

heard of in my life. Halloo, we are stopping again! This train has got so used to stopping that it can't go more than a mile without trying it. Can this be the junction? Just take a look out, will you, and report?"

"There are four rows of tracks instead of two," said Christie, "and they go criss-cross."

"Then it is the switch!" Wells exclaimed, and there was such a peculiar sound to his voice, that Christie turned from the window to look at him.

"The switch!" she repeated, "what does that mean?"

"It means that the express train passes us here, and that just about now she is rushing over those rails where I lay a few minutes ago. Here she comes!"

CHAPTER IV.

A BABY LEFT ON THE TRAIN.

A ROAR of machinery, a succession of dizzying flashes past the window, then sudden relief from the deafening noise, and the express train had gone on its way.

Christie looked at Wells Burton. His face was very grave, and she thought it a trifle paler than before.

"Did you know that?" he asked, nodding his head in the direction of the departed train.

"Did I know what?"

"That the express train was almost due, and would come thundering over me so soon?"

Christie shivered. "I did not know anything about the express train," she said.

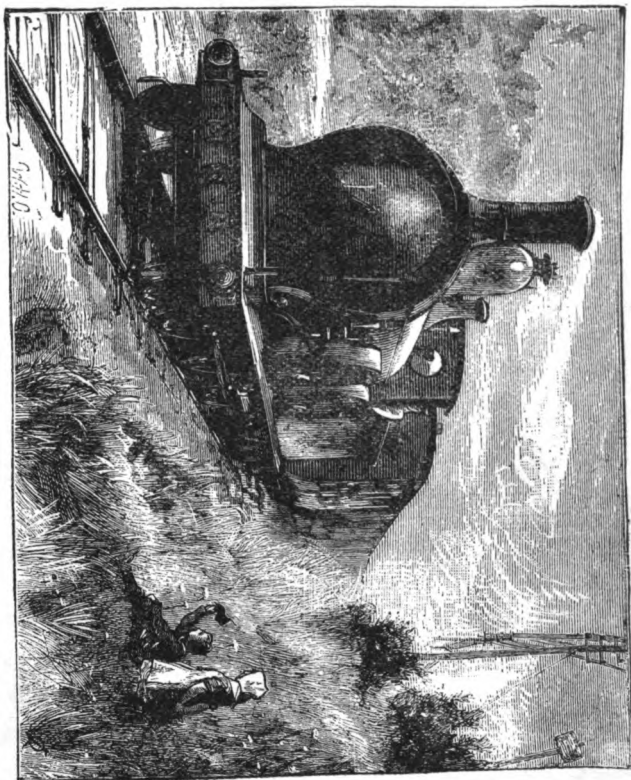
"Well, you could not have done any quicker work if you had known. It is queer I didn't think of it. I thought of almost everything else while I lay there; it was the queerest thing

that ever happened to me. I can't think how it happened. I've stood on that very step fifty times this winter, and never thought of such a thing as slipping. I suppose there was ice on my boots. Nice-looking boot, isn't it?" he said, glancing down at it. "The conductor made short work of getting it off, with that sharp knife of his. Look here, I don't know why I keep talking about boots and things, instead of trying to thank you, and show my gratitude in some way. Boys don't know how to do that sort of thing, anyhow. You ought to see my mamma; or, she ought to see you. Mothers know how to say what they feel."

"I don't want to be thanked," said Christie, her cheeks flushing, "I didn't do anything."

"No, only saved my life, and showed more pluck and common sense and quick wit than any fourteen girls put together ever had before. You see, if you had wasted twenty-five seconds, this train couldn't have run back to pick me up, without running into the express; and I should just have had to lie there and be crushed. I couldn't move, any more than if I had been dead; in fact, I was dead, when they picked me up; fainted, you know. But before I fainted, I

THE EXPRESS TRAIN HAD GONE ON ITS WAY.



knew just what had happened, and where I was, and what was likely to happen next. I didn't think of this express that had just rushed by, but I thought of the up train, due in half an hour, and I knew there wasn't a house nor a shed within a mile. Did you ever come to a place where you thought you could see pretty plainly that you were not going to live but a few minutes more?"

"Once I was very sick indeed," Christie said, "and the doctor gave me up, and mother thought I was dying; and they told me that I couldn't live but a few minutes."

"And what did you do?"

The blood rolled in waves over Christie's face and neck. It was rather hard to talk to a strange boy who might laugh at her, about one of the most solemn experiences of her life. She was not used to talking with boys, only Karl, and he never asked such straight-out questions about things, and waited for answers. Something must be said; and what should be said but the truth? Was she ashamed of it? Christie wondered.

She dropped her gray eyes, and her voice was low but clear as she said: "I prayed."

There was no sound of a laugh or a sneer in answer. "Yes," he said, nodding his head as though he understood, "so did I. I wonder if they all do when they get into downright trouble? I have heard that people did; bad men, you know, and all sorts of people. It seems sort of mean, and — well, I don't suppose girls use such words, but what we boys would call sneaking. Don't you think so?"

But Christie, in her confusion, did not understand him. Did he mean that boys would call it "sneaking" to pray? "What is it?"

"Why, living along all your life without thinking of such a thing as praying until just when you get into trouble, and then praying with all your might, and getting helped out, and going on just the same as you did before."

"Oh," said Christie, relieved, "why, yes, I think that would be mean; but then, real honest people don't do it."

"They don't? What *do* they do then? Weren't you honest?"

"Yes," said Christie gravely, "I was, but I didn't go on just as I did before; everything was just as different as could be."

"What do you mean? What was different?"

"Why, I myself. I didn't feel the same, nor do the same. I don't think I can explain what I mean."

"Didn't you pray to get well?"

"A little; and I prayed to be made ready to die if I *was* to die, and to — not to be afraid, you know."

"Well?"

"And pretty soon the feeling afraid all went away, and I didn't think it made much difference whether I got well or not; and for days and days nobody thought I would."

"But you did get well?"

"Oh, yes, I did, of course, or else I should not be here now."

And at this point Christie could not help giving a little laugh. Wells did not laugh at all. He looked grave and perplexed.

"That is just what I said," he repeated. "You prayed to be gotten out of trouble, and you got out, and then things went on as before."

"But things didn't go on as before," persisted Christie. "I asked not to be afraid to die; to have a heart given to me that could trust Jesus anyhow, whether he wanted me to live or die."

And I got it; so of course things were different."

"You got it!"

"Why, yes. All in a minute everything seemed changed. I can't tell you how; but then I know it was so."

"When was that?"

"That I was sick? It was a year ago last December, just a little bit before Christmas."

"And the difference lasts?"

"Oh, yes; it lasts," said Christie, with a curious little smile. "Every day when I'm working it all comes back, you know, in a quick little think."

She began to think that this was the strangest boy to talk she had ever heard of. He was even stranger than some of the boys in story books.

"Well," he said, after a few moments of silence, "I prayed to be made ready to die too; for when this train rattled off I didn't see any other way. It didn't seem probable that anybody would come along that lonesome road on Christmas day in time to save me, and I meant to be honest; but I didn't think of such a thing as its lasting if I got out of the scrape."

Christie looked puzzled.

"How could it last to take you to Heaven, if it wouldn't last any when you were not to go to Heaven yet?" she asked.

And then Wells Burton laughed, though the pain in his ankle immediately made heavy wrinkles come back into his face.

"It looks like playing a very poor game, I'll own," he said; "but I thought I meant it."

"But if you really did mean it, you gave y-yourself away to Him, and if you are honest, how can you take yourself back?"

To this he made no answer for several seconds, and, indeed, what he said next can hardly be called an answer:

"Then you are a Christian!"

The red came back in swift waves to Christie's cheeks. She had been so interested as to hardly remember that the talk was partly about herself; but this plain question which was also an exclamation, brought back her embarrassment.

"I think I am," she said hesitatingly, and then ashamed of such witnessing, added boldly: "Yes, I *know* I am."

"And I know that I am not," he said, with a little laugh.

After a few minutes of silence, during which Christie was wondering whether the proper thing to do now would be to go back to her seat, he spoke again:

"Isn't it time we were introduced? I know you very well indeed. You are Christie Tucker, aren't you? And the boy whom I meet at the depot almost every morning who will not look at me nor give me a chance to speak to him, is your brother Karl. I asked the stage-driver all about him. What is the use in his not speaking to me?"

"He is only ten," said Christie in apology.

"And I am only fourteen, or half-way between that and fifteen. What difference does four or five years make? When I get to be forty it won't hinder our being good friends because he is only thirty-five or so. There are not so many people to be friendly with up there where we live that we can afford to waste any of them. I looked over at your class that day I stayed to Sunday-school, and thought you were having a nice time."

"We were," said Christie with animation.

"Mr. Keith is splendid."

Wells made a gesture of disagreement.



"EVERY DAY WHEN I AM WORKING IT ALL COMES BACK,"

"I don't like ministers as a rule," he said ;
"they always pitch into a fellow so."

"I don't know what that is," said Christie simply ; "but every one likes Mr. Keith — that is, every one but bad men ; of course they don't like him because he makes them remember that they are bad, and they want to forget it."

"Do you suppose that is the reason why I don't like him?" Wells asked with a comical little look. And then, his face growing grave, "I'll tell you a queer thing, though. Back there, while I lay across those rails and thought I was done with things, I didn't even think of mamma in the sense that I wanted her there that minute, the only one that I thought of was this Mr. Keith. I wished for him, not to pull me off of the track, you know, which would have been the reasonable thing to do if he had been there, but to pray for me ; and I never saw him but twice in my life. I'll tell you what made me think of that though. Do you remember a Sunday when they thought that Olin boy was going to die? Well, I was in church that Sunday, and Mr. Keith prayed for him ; and I thought then if I were going to die I should like to have Mr. Keith pray for me. Aren't

we going most uncommonly slow? By the way my foot twinges I should say we had been about seventeen hours so far reaching the city, and we must be twelve or fourteen miles away yet. I declare, if we are not stopping again! What for, I'd like to know? There is no station here."

What for, indeed? That question seemed to be on the faces of all the passengers. Christie looked out of the window; so did everybody else except Wells Burton who could not lift himself up to do so.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"It is nowhere," answered Christie with a little laugh. "We seem to be just in the road. There isn't a house to be seen, and there is snow everywhere where there isn't mud. No, I don't think there is any station; at least, I don't see any depot."

"I know there isn't a station nor a depot," said Wells confidently, "unless it has been built since last night."

"What's the matter, sir?" This last to a man who had been out to hear the news.

"Track washed away," said the man using as few words as possible, and looking gloomy.

"Washed away! Why, how much of it?"

"More than I know ; some say half a mile, and some say five miles ; enough of it to keep us standing here longer than we want to, I guess."

"Where is 'here?' Are we near the station?"

"No, two miles out."

"And is it right here that the track has washed?"

"No, half a mile or so up the track ; they sent signals down to us."

"Thank you, sir," said Wells, and the man moved on.

"Here's a go !" the boy said gravely. "Or no, it isn't, it's a standstill ; and that's slang, I suppose. My mother hates slang, and so does yours I presume, mothers all do ; I beg your pardon for using it ; but I do wonder how long we are to be stopped here ! If it is going to be long, I'm afraid I shall wish for a surgeon to cut off my foot."

"Does it pain you very much?" asked Christie sympathetically.

"Well, I've had things that felt pleasanter. These heavy rains and then the thaw have played the mischief with the railroad track ; father said he was afraid there would be trouble.

But I just wish they had waited until after Christmas. I'm afraid you and I will be late to our Christmas dinner."

"I'm sorry for that poor man," said Christie, twisting herself to get a glimpse of the sad-faced young man who had his watch in his hand at this moment. "There is a sick friend whom he thinks he could help if he could only get there in time; see how troubled he looks."

"Poor fellow!" said Wells sympathetically.

But the next moment Christie's attention was turned elsewhere. She turned herself completely around and gazed up and down the car; finally she stood up on tiptoe for a moment.

"What's the trouble?" asked Wells. "Lost something?"

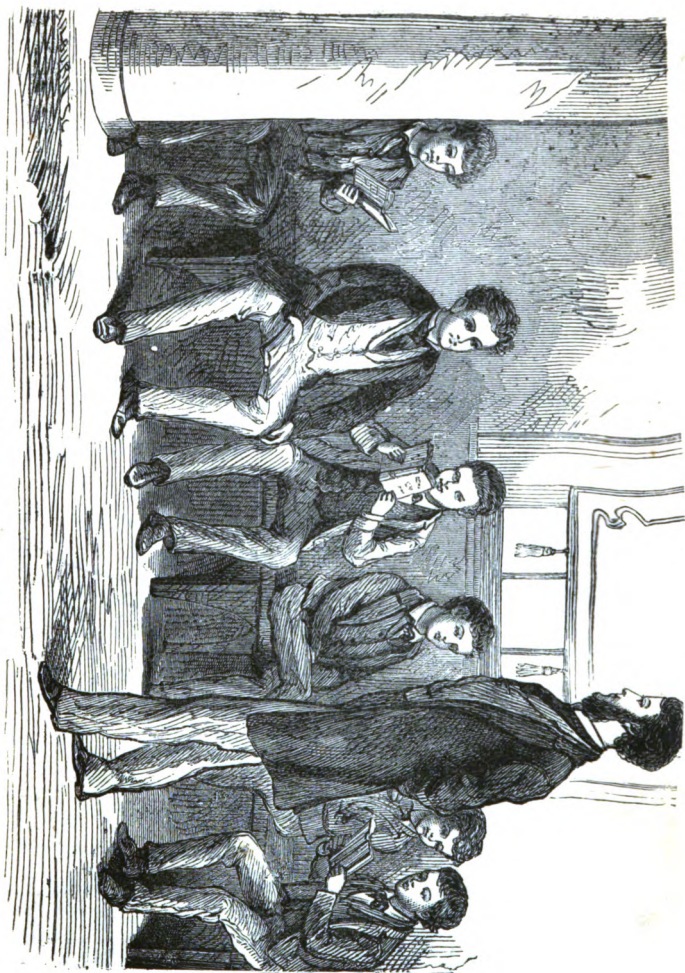
But by way of answer she turned toward him, her face full of anxiety, and asked: "Where is that baby's mother?"

"What baby? The lady with a baby got off at the last station."

"Why, no she didn't; I see the baby as plain as can be, lying on the little bed she made for him; he is fast asleep, but I don't see her anywhere."

"I tell you she got off," said Wells, growing

I LOOKED OVER AT YOUR CLASS.



earnest. "I happened to be looking right at her; I noticed her particularly because she had a shawl like mamma's, and I wondered if she looked like mamma, and I stared at her a good deal to find out. Oh, yes, she stepped off the cars and stepped into a mud puddle and got her feet wet, and looked cross. I raised myself up to see her do it and hurt my foot by the means, and then *I* looked cross."

"Then," said Christie, her face full of anxiety, not to say terror, "then she has left her baby!"

Unlikely as it sounds, this appeared to be the case. In the course of a few minutes somebody else began to be interested in the same thought; that was no other person than the baby himself; he began to rub his eyes, and yawn, and twist about on his narrow bed in a very dangerous way. At last he was only held on by the cane of a gentleman who built a fence before baby by holding up the cane, then he looked about him in a savage manner, and asked, "Where is this child's mother?"

Where indeed! That was just what baby wanted to know, and he began to give warning little whimpers which said: "I'll cry in a way

to astonish you, if somebody doesn't come and attend to me very soon."

What was to be done? Christie looked about her very much startled, and discovered that there was but one lady in the car; she was young and pretty, dressed in velvet, and looked as though she thought babies were a mistake and a nuisance.

"Madam," said the man with the cane, glowering at her, "do you know anything about the child's mother?"

"How should I?" answered the velvet-dressed lady, and she immediately went back to her Seaside Library book.

Then the baby gave a warning yell. Christie started up. "That baby is afraid," she said to Wells. "The next thing he will cry so hard that nobody can stop him; I'm going over there."

"Do you know him?" asked Wells, looking at the baby as though he would much rather undertake to pacify a cross dog.

"Oh, no; I don't know who he is at all; but he begins to cry as though he was afraid, and if it was our baby at home, I don't know what I should do."

With this rather mixed-up sentence she hurried away, and in another moment was bending over the baby who had not fully decided whether to be angry or grieved over the strange treatment he was receiving. He had his lips in a dreadful pucker, and the squeal he was prepared to give would, I think, have astonished all the people, but he changed his mind when he saw Christie, and gave her an astonished stare, and made no objection when she raised him with cooing words, and cuddled his face to hers.

"Is he your brother?" inquired the gentleman with the cane. "You shouldn't leave him alone in that way; it is very careless; he might have rolled off and knocked his brains out."

"Oh, no, sir," said Christie, who by this time could not help smiling to think how many people she was expected to claim as relatives. "I don't know who he is, poor baby! and I can't think what has become of his mother." Then she kissed him.

CHAPTER V.

WHERE IS BABY'S MOTHER?

THAT is just what baby did not know, and in spite of the kiss, he made up his mind to cry. It was very distressing. Christie walked up and down in the bit of a space, and cuddled the poor fellow, and whispered loving words to him, and cooed a lullaby into his ear, but he would have none of them; he wanted just one thing, and that was his mother's face.

The gentlemen began to interest themselves in the matter, though the velvet-dressed young lady was still deep in her "Seaside Library," only taking time to dart a frown at baby for being so noisy. One and another asked who had been with the child, and what had become of her; and Wells told his story about seeing her leave the car at the last station.

"A case of desertion," said one man, looking severely at Christie, as though she might be the

cause ; but she looked back at him out of very cross eyes, and was glad that she did. The idea of any mother deserting her baby !

Presently came the conductor, and two or three people tried to talk to him at once.

"I noticed the lady leave the car," he said. "She asked me how much time there would be ; she has got herself left, I presume ; women are always doing it ; she stayed to tie her bonnet in another kind of a knot, or something equally important, and she is probably fuming away at the station at this moment, calling the cars all sorts of names, as though they were to blame for her silliness."

"And when can she get to baby, sir ?"

It was Christie's eager, sorrowful voice that asked the question ; she knew now which she pitied the most, and that was baby's mother.

The conductor turned and looked at her. "More than I know," he said shortly. "Do you belong to her ? Are you the child's nurse ?"

"Oh no, sir," said Christie, and this time she had much ado to keep from smiling outright. "I never saw him before ;" but she cuddled him to her as she spoke, and he put one fat arm around her neck, and gazed about him.

"Well," said the conductor, "he seems to take to you, and that is fortunate; there's no telling when we will get out of this; it is a bad mess."

Then up spoke Wells Burton. "But, conductor, the lady can get back to her baby, can't she, on the nine o'clock accommodation?"

"When the nine o'clock accommodation comes along, I dare say she can," replied that gentleman in a very significant tone; "but there's no telling when that will be."

"Why? Can't it come up before we leave here? Will it have to wait at the last station until we go on?"

Two gentlemen asked these two questions, and Christie waited eagerly for their answer, while baby, the most interested party, gave all his attention to the blue ribbon on her hair, and tried to poke it in his mouth and ruin it; ungrateful fellow that he was!

"If it doesn't have to wait any longer than until we go on, it may be thankful," said the conductor. "The rumor is that the bridge went down just after we crossed it; if that is so, we don't know when another train will get over."



I LOST A PENNY, AND SCOLDED AT THAT.

Then you should have heard the exclamations of dismay.

"What! the high bridge! Went *down*, did you say? Why, it isn't twenty minutes since we passed over! I thought you moved over very slowly — as if things were shaky."

"Can't you get a telegram, conductor, and learn the truth of the report?"

"Not very well, sir, while we lie here. If we ever reach another station, we shall have a telegram, I presume; meantime there isn't any particular danger of our being run over from either direction, so far as I can see."

"And when can we hope to get on?"

It was the pale-faced young man, with his watch in his hand, who asked this question. Christie thought his face grew paler yet as he listened to the answer.

"Well, sir, that's telling; perhaps in half an hour, perhaps not under two hours; we don't really know the extent of the damage yet; our men have gone forward to discover, and they will send workmen from the city as soon as they can; but everything is out of gear this morning; there has been trouble in all directions, and the railroad hands can't be everywhere at once;

there's no telling what the delay will be; of course we hope we can hurry things up."

Dear! dear! what a state of things. Disheartening as it all was, Christie could not help being astonished to see how cross the people were.

"They act exactly as though they thought the roads and the bridges had done it on purpose to vex them," she told Wells as she obeyed the motion of his hand and brought the baby to the turned seat in front of him. "Do you suppose they really know of somebody who is to blame?"

"Why, no," said Wells thoughtfully, "I presume not; they just fret and say 'it is pretty business!' and all that sort of thing, because that is the natural way to act when folks are disappointed. Isn't that the way you do when things don't go to suit you?"

Christie's head drooped a little, and the pretty pink flush began to come on her cheek. "Once I used to do it to things," she said slowly, with a marked emphasis on the word "things." "I would slam the door when I was cross about something, and I would scold the kitchen fire for not burning, and I would put the wood down

on the hearth with a great bang; but once I lost a penny under the carpet and I scolded about that; but that was when I was alone. The minute Mrs. Briggs came in to see mother, or even the market man stopped to see if we wanted anything, I would shut the door gently, and lay the wood on the hearth just as softly as I could, and I worked half an hour once, helping Susan Briggs open her desk, and never thought of being cross, because I was ashamed, you know, to have them see me do any other way. Now shouldn't you think these people would feel kind of ashamed to grumble before one another?"

But the only answer that Wells seemed to have ready for this was an absent-minded laugh; he was thinking of one part of Christie's sentence that he wanted to have explained.

"Look here," he said, "you say you used to be cross at things. Do you mean that you've given even that up?"

Christie gravely bowed her head. "I'm most cured of it," she said softly. "I think it is only once in a long while now that I forget. I was so in the habit of it that it was dreadfully hard work. You see this was after I had begun to try to do right; and I thought if I kept pleasant

before people, there wouldn't be anything wrong in slamming doors a little — when nobody was there to see — and in scolding the fire because it couldn't have its feelings hurt, you know; but when I found out that it was almost worse to do that than to be cross to people, I tried hard to give it up."

"You are talking Greek to me," Wells said good-naturedly, but the tone said that he was very much interested, and should really like to understand Greek if he could. "What possible harm could there be in slamming a door, or growling at a fire, so long as nobody heard you? I should say it was a safe and comfortable way of working off ill humor; I'm sure I wish some of the peppery folks I know would try that fashion. What made you think there was anything bad about it?"

"I didn't find it out myself," Christie said, her eyes drooping again. "You see I got into trouble. I wanted some things that I couldn't have, and I wanted to do some things that I couldn't do, and I thought about them until they made me feel cross half the time. I slammed all the doors I could, and the fire needed scolding every time I went near it, and

I"—here there was a little hesitation, and the cheeks grew pinker — "I even got to scolding at Nettie when she was most asleep and couldn't hear me: real hateful things I said to her, about being the hardest baby to get to sleep that ever was born, and about taking all my time so that I couldn't study, nor knit, nor anything. I never would have said it to her if she had been awake, and I used to kiss her as soon as I had tucked her in the crib, but for all that, I grumbled at her a great deal. At last it got so bad that I knew I was getting to be cross all the time, and I couldn't seem to stop it; and one day I told the minister about it."

"You did!" Wells Burton's exclamation had a good deal of admiration in it: the truth was, he began to think that Christie must be a very brave girl. He told himself that he would rather stop twenty trains of cars than to go to the minister and have a talk about his faults! But Christie believed he thought she was a simpleton. Nevertheless she meant to tell just the truth.

"Yes, I did," she said steadily. "One day he came to see us, and mother wasn't at home. The baby at Briggs' had burned himself and

they sent for mother, and father had gone to the mill, and there wasn't anybody at home, only just Nettie and me, and I had been real cross to her: I shook her a little speck, not to hurt, you know, but then it was horrid; I felt so ashamed of myself that I cried; and just then the minister came. He asked me right away what was the matter, and that made me cry again, and then, you know, I almost had to tell him. It was something he said that has helped me ever since."

"Do you mind telling me what it was?" Wells Burton's voice was so gentle, that she gave up the fancy that he was making fun of her.

"Why, it was something that I knew all the time, and I've often wondered that I did not think of it for myself. I told him that I had no trouble in being pleasant before people, because I would be so ashamed to have them see me looking cross. And that I kept my *words* pretty near right, but I couldn't manage my thoughts. And he asked me how I thought I should act if Jesus should come to our house, as he used to, at Mary and Martha's. I told him that I knew then I should act just as well

as I could; then he asked me if I did not remember that Jesus *had* come to our house, and was staying there all the time, and heard all my thoughts, as well as my words? You don't know how it made me feel for a moment; I just felt scared. It seemed to me that I could remember all the times that I had banged the door, and rattled the wood, and Jesus looking at me! What made me most ashamed, was, that I had tried to behave myself before Mrs. Briggs, and the other neighbors, and never minded how I behaved before Jesus. Just as though I thought more of them than I did of him!"

"Humph!" said Wells. "I don't pretend to understand. I don't see how that helped you a bit. Of course if a fellow could realize that Jesus was listening to what he said, it would make a big difference all the time. There are fifty thousand things a fellow says and does that he wouldn't do for the world! But the trouble is you *can't* realize it. A person that you can see and hear is very different from one that you can't see and hear; now that's the truth, and I don't see how anybody can say it isn't. Do you mean to have me understand that you are as

sure of Jesus being near you as you are that I sit on this seat talking to you?"

"I'm just as *sure* of it," Christie said with a quiet positiveness that went a great way toward proving the truth of her words; "but then it is a different feeling, of course. I can't explain it to you; I don't know how. I suppose if you were to talk with our minister he would make it all plain. But I know this: the more you pray, the surer you get that Jesus stays right beside you, and listens to all you say. I'm a *great deal* surer of it than I used to be, and it keeps growing surer all the time."

Meantime, you are wondering what that baby was about, and why he endured so long a conversation that he did not understand. The truth is, that in telling you about the conversation, I have left out the number of times that Christie lifted him from one shoulder to the other, and the sweet cooing words she continually put in, between her answers, and the number of times Wells snapped his fingers for baby's benefit, and how he took his watch from its chain, and gave it to Christie to hold, so that the baby could see it. But at last baby's patience was entirely gone. He would



I HELPED SUSAN BRIGGS OPEN HER DESK.

have nothing more to do with the watch, and he pushed Christie's hand away savagely, when she tried to pat his cheek. He had occasionally given some very loud yells, as specimens of what he could do, and now he went at it in earnest.

In vain Christie tossed, and cooed, and patted. He yelled the louder. The lady with the Seaside story was very much annoyed. She shot angry glances over at the perplexed little maid, and at last she said, "I should think if you cannot keep that child quiet, it would be well for you to let him alone."

"Perhaps the lady will take him for awhile, your arms must be very tired."

This was Wells' suggestion, and he enjoyed the look of disgust on her face, as she said: "I know nothing about babies: but I think it is an imposition on the travelling public to have one screaming in this fashion."

"Then," said Wells, "would you in this case recommend choking, or what would you advise us to do?"

"You are a very impudent boy!" the lady said, and she went back to her book, with red cheeks.

Christie could not help laughing a little, though she was not sure but the lady was correct. And the baby yelled! Not another lady among the passengers. The last one had left the car at that unfortunate station where the poor mother stopped. The pale-faced young man came forward next; he did not look cross, only sorry. "Poor fellow!" he said to the baby, "you think you are having a hard time, I suppose, but there are worse trials in life than yours. What would he say to me, do you think? I might take him for a walk up and down the car and rest your arms."

But the perverse baby yelled like a lunatic the moment the thing was attempted, and utterly refused to leave his small protector's side.

"He shows good taste," said the pale young man with a wan smile; "he probably sees that I know very little about babies."

Then the nice old gentleman decided to show his skill. "What would he say to a sugar plum, do you suppose?" he asked, bending kindly over Christie, and showing a round, white candy.

"He'll be sure to approve of that," Wells said, but Christie hesitated, and a lovely color glowed on her cheeks. "If you please, sir,"

she said timidly, "I don't know whether his mother would like it: they don't let some babies have candy at all: mother thinks it is bad for them."

"Ah! yes," he said, "I ought to know it by this time: I'm always getting into disgrace with my daughters by bringing the stuff to their babies: they don't allow it at all, and you are a wise little woman to think of it."

CHAPTER VI.

THE UGLY LOOKING HOUSE.

YOU have no idea what a life that baby led them, unless you have a little brother or sister at home. I suppose you have but little idea how a baby can cry, who is very tired, and hungry, and a good deal frightened; for by this time he began to think it the strangest thing in life that his mother did not come and attend to him. Christie took a hint from the pale young man, and began to walk up and down the car, with Baby in her arms; but he was much heavier than the baby at home, and it took very little of this exercise to make her young back ache. Wells looked on sympathetically, as well as a little indignantly. Unable to take a step, or even to twist himself about, so that he could take the baby in his arms, he told himself that if he were that young man he would see if he could not carry that baby

a while, and not let a little girl tug with it all the time. Suppose he did yell, what of it? That was no more than he was doing now, every time he thought of it. He should like to see himself scared away by the crying of a baby! As for the literary young lady, words could not express his contempt for her; he showed it by curling his lip most expressively whenever he looked in her direction. But she, having once more buried herself in her book, lost all this.

"I know what the poor little fellow would like," said Christie, returning to Wells, during a lull. "He is so hungry that he can't help crying. He keeps stuffing both his little hands into his mouth; they are always hungry when they do that. His mother had some milk in a bottle for him, in that little satchel she carried in her hand. I saw her offer him some once, but he wasn't hungry just then, and pushed it away. I just wish she had left the bag when she went away; but she carried it on her arm."

"Probably it had her pocket-book in it as well as a bottle of milk," Wells said; and then: "I'm sorry for the poor little chap, if he is

hungry; we all stand a fair chance to be in the same fix if we stay here long."

"I have cookies, and things," said Christie thoughtfully; "but they won't do for babies, you know."

"I don't know a thing about it," declared Wells. "But I should think that folks would rather have them eat cookies than starve."

There was no denying this, so Christie only laughed; but as yet she did not resort to cookies. She thought of the rows of milk pans ranged on the shelves at home; if she only had one of them! She thought of the milk can that had started from home with them; what a pity that its stopping-place had been one station back. Away over in the fields, no other house near it, stood what looked like a bit of a farmhouse. Christie wondered whether they had milk there, and whether somebody couldn't go there and try to get some. She mentioned the wonder to Wells.

"It's a forlorn little place," he said, trying to raise himself on one elbow to see it, frowning deeply with pain as he did so.

"I don't believe they have any milk there that is fit to drink. Besides, how could a body



THE LADY WELLS BURTON KNEW.

get to it? They would get up to their ears in mud. Those fields look as though they had no bottom to them. My! how quick I would skip over there if I had the use of my feet!"

Christie could not help smiling again, at the apparent contradictions in his words; but she kept looking out at the little house, between her soothings of the baby.

"I most believe I will try it," she said at last. "Something has got to be done; this baby is almost starved; I suppose that he was so busy gazing about him this morning, that he could not eat his breakfast."

"You!" said Wells, regarding her with surprise, mingled with respect. "Why, you would stick fast in the mud. I don't believe that mother of yours would like such doings at all."

Christie looked down at her trim new shoes; she so seldom had a new pair that these were treasures; a little nicer, they were, than any she ever had before; she remembered, too, her mother's oft-repeated charge, on no account to step off the train until they reached the city; yet she said resolutely: "My mother always likes me to do things that ought to be done. I

think I am going to try it. I don't see another person who would be likely to go."

"Suppose you try the young lady in the velvet gown?" said Wells; "she has almost finished her story."

Then he and Christie both laughed. Her face sobered at once, and she began to take anxious looks through the cars. The old gentleman was not to be thought of for a moment; his hair was too white to think of his taking a tramp like that. There was the pale-faced man, but she looked regretfully at his shining boots and beautiful pantaloons. The mud would certainly ruin them; and what a plight he would be in when they reached the city! She almost thought he would go, if she were to ask him, but it did seem too bad to do so.

"O baby, baby!" she said in a soft cooing tone, "couldn't you possibly lay your head on my shoulder and take a nice little nap? Then perhaps the train will go on in a few minutes, and maybe the bridge isn't down at all; and maybe the nine o'clock train will come in all right, and bring your mamma, and she will have a bottle full of nice milk for you."

But the baby was utterly disgusted with this

suggestion. He put no faith in any of it; he angrily bobbed up his head as often as Christie tried to cuddle it in her neck. He snatched at her hair, and tried to pull the very braids out by the roots; he scratched at her face, and in various other ways conducted himself like a tiger. Wells, meantime, seeing Christie glance toward the house in the fields, with a resolution of some sort growing on her face, made a suggestion:

"There is one thing you want to think of, whoever tramps off there, runs the risk of having this train skip off and leave them. I dare say we may go in a little while; trains are hardly ever detained as long as they think they are going to be. Once, when we were East, there was something the matter with the track, and the conductor didn't think we could go on under three hours, and father let my sister Estelle and I go and take a walk; and in just half an hour that train went on, and Estelle and I had no end of a time getting with our folks again!" concluded Wells, very wisely.

This story, like many other things in this world, had an exactly opposite effect from what was intended.

"I shall go myself," said Christie positively. To herself she said: "I shall never ask that poor young man to go and run the risk of missing the train, when he is in such a hurry; and the rest of these people look as though they wouldn't do it for anything, and as though I would rather go three times than to ask them."

"What will you do if the train takes a notion to go on?" said Wells, dismayed for her.

"Why," said Christie, "if this train can go on, another can come, or go, sometime, you know; and I could wait for it and take it. Would they take my ticket on another train?" The startled tone in which she asked this question, made Wells understand that her ticket was a matter of importance to her. He set her mind at rest about that, and then came to the front with a new idea:

"Have you a return ticket? When were you coming back, anyhow?"

"To-night;" said Christie, laughing in spite of all the troubles of the way. "Do you suppose I shall get there in time to come back? What did you say about a return ticket? Ought I to have one?"

"Why, that is the way they generally do," this old traveller explained; "buy a round trip ticket, you know, it saves ten or fifteen cents; but it is of no consequence, you can just as well buy one at the city station if you ever get there."

Christie looked down at her ticket with a perplexed and sorrowful air; it was not *round* certainly. If it ought to have been, and if anything that she could have done about it would have saved her fifteen cents, she was very sorry, for money was of great consequence to her. "I did not know about it," she said meekly; and felt that she did not yet know, and that, by and by, when things were quieter, she would ask Wells why it was that round tickets were cheaper, and why they did not give her one. Meantime the poor discouraged baby had settled into a restless slumber; Christie had been watching his eyes shut, while she walked slowly back and forth in the car. She did not believe he would sleep long, he was too hungry for that. And now her resolution was formed. "I'm going over there to try to get some milk," she said firmly. "If somebody would make a nice little pillow of my shawl, I could lay the

poor baby down. Do you suppose the old gentleman with the gold glasses would see that he did not roll off the seat?"

"Why do you pick him out?" asked Wells, amused over the whole thing, and much disgusted that he could not help. "Give me the shawl; I can roll it up. I haven't sprained my *hands*, at least. Now lay the young scamp down, and go and give the old gentleman our compliments, and say that he is appointed special guard, with orders not to fall asleep at his post, under pain of being scratched."

Christie's eyes were brim full of fun, but she went over to the old gentleman, with a gravely gentle face, and made known her petition.

"Eh, what?" he said, coming back from some day-dream with a sigh. Oh yes, certainly he would keep the poor little fellow from rolling off. "But if he cries," he said anxiously, "I shall not know what to do; I never could do anything with babies when they cried."

Christie could only hope that this one would not cry; and having established the guard where she wanted him, she prepared to set off.

By this time Wells had another idea. He

had been fumbling in his pocket, and now drew out his handsome Russia leather pocket-book.

"Just let me furnish the funds for the youngster, won't you? since I can't help in any other way."

"Will I need money?" Christie asked, stopping with a startled air, to look into his face. Her mother lived in a little house back in the fields, but she would never think of taking money in return for a little milk to be given to a hungry baby.

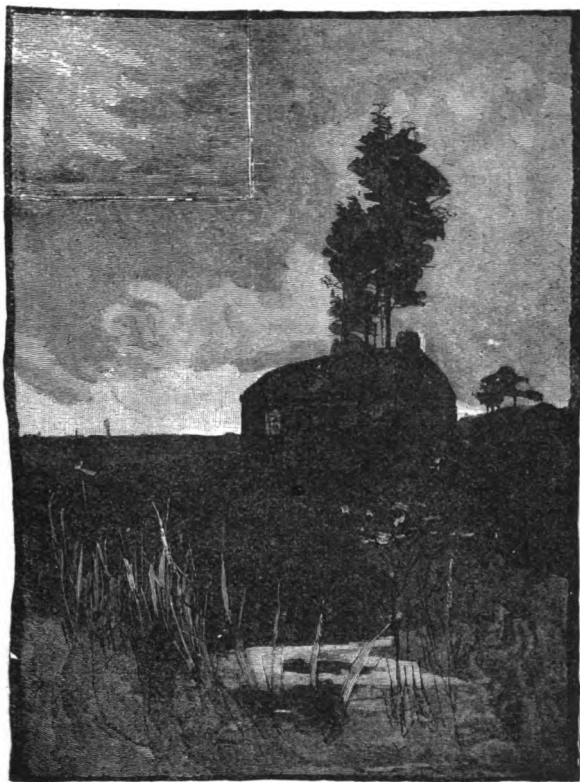
"Why, of course," said Wells. "That is, if you get any milk, which I doubt; the house doesn't look like it from here. But you will have to buy a pitcher, or something to put it in; they won't trust you; they'll think you are a tramp, you know. Offer to pay them well, and the little chap will fare a good deal better than he will if you ask a favor."

As he spoke he held out a crisp bank note. Christie took it slowly, with a bright glow on her cheeks. It was a five dollar bill. She had never had so much money in her hands before: and to tell the truth, she did not quite like to have this in her hands. She had to remind herself that the milk was not for her, and that she

certainly had not money enough of her own to pay for it, and get back home with. Just then — wise little woman that she was — came into play some of the good sense which her good mother had tried so hard to teach her. She handed back the crisp new note. "Give me something smaller, please," she said pleasantly, "I don't like to carry so much, nor to offer it; they would think I was a very suspicious tramp. Milk is only ten cents a quart, and a pitcher or a tin pail does not cost much."

It was Wells' turn to blush now; he plainly saw that she had been the more business-like of the two, and crumpling the bill in his hand, he produced some shining silver pieces in its place, and Christie went.

Oh, but that mud was deep! How quickly were the trim new shoes besmeared all over with a thick yellow plaster? Worse than that, they were getting too heavy to carry; it was as much as she could do to drag them from one bog to the other; for the road seemed to be made up of a succession of bogs. Once she came to a little pool of muddy water; came to it before she saw it; splashed right in, and soaked her feet away above the ankles, and



THE LITTLE UGLY-LOOKING HOUSE.

spattered the pretty dress. Dear! dear! If mother could see her now! What a thing it was to go off on a Christmas ride!

It was a long walk: much longer than it had seemed from the car window. With every step the difficulty of getting on increased, and once she had really to lean against a friendly post that seemed set up to mark the lot, and try to dig the mud from her shoes. How surely they were ruined; and they were to have been her Sunday best for a year!

There was another sad thought connected with all this: What a plight she would be in by the time she reached uncle Daniel's. And mother had taken such pride in having her so neatly dressed, with a new-fashioned jacket and all! What with the mud, and the weariness, and the anxiety, she could hardly keep the tears from falling as they rushed into her eyes. But she shut them back resolutely and said aloud: "*I know* I am doing right. That baby will get sick if he don't have his milk; and a baby is worth more than ten pairs of shoes and a new dress besides."

Now she was fairly at the gate of the little ugly-looking house. In a minute more she would be inside.

No, she wouldn't. Bow, wow! wow! Here was a fellow who disputed the way with her, and came suddenly towards her, as if the least that he should think of doing was to swallow her at once.

Now it happened that Christie, unusually brave about most things, was dreadfully afraid of a dog.

She gave a pitiful little shriek, and the next thing she knew, she was picking herself out of the meanest-looking mud hole she had seen in her trip. The dog had retired to a safe distance, and with his head hung down, and his silly little tail between his legs, was receiving a lecture from a woman with a frowzy head, and sleeves rolled up at the elbow, who appeared in the door of the little house. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself!" she said, shaking her head; "a decent dog you are to be cutting up such tricks! Come along, child; what do you want? There's no kind of need of your being afraid of that there dog; there ain't a bigger coward in all Kansas than he is. Mercy on me! What a

fix you are in! I guess your ma, whoever she is, will give you something to make you remember Bose. You've just about ruined your dress. Where did you come from, anyway?"

Poor Christie, her face in a deeper glow than had been on it during this eventful morning, limping a little in one foot, and wondering whether this was another sprain, made her way across the stretch of mud that still lay between her and the house, and began her story.

The open door gave her a view of quite a good-sized kitchen in which all sorts of household work seemed to be going on at once. A smell of cabbage came from the big pot on the stove; a smell of gingerbread came from the open door of the oven, where a young woman knelt to examine it, a pan of apples partly pared sat on the table, and quite close to them tied into a chair, sat a yellow-headed baby, in a pink calico dress, and wearing a pug nose, washed-out blue eyes, and a soiled face.

He looked utterly unlike the baby in the cars, and did not once suggest the baby at home. Yet Christie was glad to see him. Probably they had milk, and they would have tender hearts for other babies.

"If you please," she began in a gentle explanatory tone, the woman still standing in the door, holding it partly open, "I came from the cars over here: the train is stopped by some trouble, and there is a poor baby whose mother" — here she gave a little squeal and sprang past the woman in the door, quite into the kitchen.

"For the land's sake! I believe she's crazy!" Thus much the woman said, before she saw what was the matter; and really by the time she saw, there was nothing the matter; the danger was over. It was just one of those things that happen in a second, or else they do not happen at all. There was a girl about the size of Christie whose business it evidently was to attend to the restless, tied-up baby, and who had been so occupied in staring at Christie that she had entirely forgotten her duty. Baby thus left to employ his wits, discovered that by a sudden tilting motion he could tip his chair backwards, and give himself a ride. Moreover, I fancy, argued that this process might in time loosen the chains that bound him to the chair; so he tried it. Just as Christie looked that way he had tried it for the fourth time with such effect that the chair lost its balance, and the

glowing stove was exactly behind it! In reality the baby's head did not touch the stove at all, because he held it up and yelled. At least that was one reason; the other was that in less than a quarter of a second the chair was righted by Christie herself; for just one spring brought her from the door to the chair. But dear me! you should have seen the excitement which prevailed in the little log house then. That baby was just as important as any other baby in the world. His mother untied with nervous fingers the string that bound him, and hugged, and kissed, and cried over him, and praised Christie, and scolded Sarah Ann, all in one breath.

"Just to think!" she said. "If you hadn't a-seen him just that minute and sprung like a deer, he might a-been burned to a crisp! Mother's precious darling Jimmy! Sarah Ann, you good-for-nothing young one you, don't stand there whimpering; if you had been attending to your business instead of staring, this wouldn't have happened. Go out into the woodshed, do; you make me sick."

This advice was accompanied by a box on the ear; not a hard slap, in fact, I doubt whether

Sarah Ann felt it at all; but that she felt the tongue, and was painfully ashamed, was evident: her face flamed a deep red, and her sobs came deeply drawn, as she vanished by the woodshed door. Christie felt sorry for her, and indignant with her mother. There was a very great difference in mothers, certainly, greater than she had ever supposed.

The indignation gave her courage to tell her story rapidly and well. There were a great many exclamations over it, and a great many questions asked and answered, and Christie had to kiss the baby, which she would not have minded at all if his face had been clean. She had a chance to wash the mud from her face and hands, and the woman herself carefully brushed mud from the pretty suit, bewailing the stains, and finding one place with a zigzag tear. It all took time, and Christie was conscious of listening painfully for the whistle of the departing train. But at last she was started on her way; her shoes exchanged for a pair of ugly-looking boots, which the woman told her she might leave in the bog by the railroad track, and she had the comfort of hearing it said in a loud whisper, that they were so

awful worn out and good for nothing, that Josiah wouldn't care much if she did make off with them. After that Christie had a mind not to take them, but she looked down at the shoes hung over her arm, which had been cleaned, and could be dried when she reached the train, and concluded to be meek; especially since they did not know her at all. How could they be sure that she did not want to run away with Josiah's boots?

On her arm she had a pail of milk, which looked rich and creamy, and she had bought a new little tin cup which the woman said they got for Jimmy only yesterday. For the cup she paid eight cents, and for the pail twenty-five, but they would take nothing for the milk, and there was a good quart, Christie calculated.

On the whole, her trip back to the train was much pleasanter than the journey out had been. She discovered that day why boys wore boots, a thing that she had never understood before. They certainly made their way through the mud much better than shoes. .

There stood the train, without apparently having had a thought of going away to leave her.

She set down her pail, and carefully pulled off the boots and laid them in a sort of gully at the side of the track, then slipped into her own wet ones, and climbed into the train. None too soon, for baby was shrieking wildly. The old gentleman looked relieved when he saw her.

"Well, little woman," he said, "our hopes all rest on you. If you can quiet this storm, we shall owe you a debt of gratitude."

"We've been having a first-class circus here," said Wells, "ever since you went. You hadn't jumped the first mud puddle when he opened his eyes and looked around him and began. That Seaside Library woman over there is going to have him sent to the house of correction as soon as ever we reach the city. I see it in her eyes."

"Poor fellow!" said Christie; but she did not mean the old gentleman in spectacles, nor yet Wells Burton.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HELPER STILL.

DO you imagine that the train soon started? Nothing seemed farther from its thoughts.

The baby eagerly drank his milk from the bright tin cup, much occupied, it is true, as soon as his first hunger was appeased, with gazing at the queer shapes in its sides, but never recognizing, apparently, his own beautiful face; but after each gaze, he would seize the cup and take another long draught.

"I tell you he was hungry and thirsty both, I should think!" Wells said, watching him with interest; "his mother ought to give you a great many thanks for this."

"Poor mother!" said Christie with a sigh, and she drew the baby closer. He settled back in her arms at last, satisfied and smiling. "Tamed," Wells called it, and he and the

old gentleman who had returned to his own seat exchanged smiles of admiration, as Christie "mothered" the baby, cooing him presently into quiet, restful slumber.

The shawl did duty again as a pillow, and this time, genuine sleeping was done.

Long past nine o'clock now, and no train either came or went. The officials seemed all to have departed, and some of the passengers. The old gentleman kept his seat, so did the pale-faced man, so did the disgusted young lady who had finished her book, and had now no other occupation to indulge in but grumbling.

"How far are we from the city?" Christie questioned.

"Why, not more than a dozen miles."

"I should think some of the men who are in a hurry would try to hire a wagon to take them in."

Wells shook his head. "I should like to see a wagon that could get through this mud!" he explained. "You see there is no wagon road; the old road strikes off at that junction down below, and winds around, I don't know how many miles. I don't suppose it would be possi-

ble to drive direct from here to the city, and the regular road is used so little out this way now, that it must be horrid after these rains."

"Well, shouldn't you think that man over there, who is so anxious, would try to walk? I think I could walk twelve miles if mother or the baby was sick."

"Not in this mud, I venture. I doubt if you ever took many long walks in such mud. Why, in some places it is knee deep! Besides, don't you see he would stand a chance of seeing this train whisk by him when he was about half way. No; his best plan is to sit still and be patient."

"He doesn't look patient," said Christie. "I never saw anybody's face look less patient than his; and I am so sorry for him I don't know what to do. I keep thinking I wish I could do something to help him. I wonder if it is his mother who is sick."

Wells studied him for a few minutes, and then gave it as his opinion that it was the lady whom he meant to marry; though why he thought so, I am sure I don't know.

The next thing that claimed attention was the sprained ankle.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Wells, "there's

something going on down there in my foot that I don't like. It gives the most horrid little tweaks of pain every few minutes that you ever heard of, and it is swelling so that I don't believe I shall ever be able to wear a boot again."

"It ought to be bathed," said Christie, "and bandaged; that is what mother did when father sprained his foot once. She took cold water and bathed and bathed it, oh, a long time! then she made a great long bandage, and bound it up, and it got well after awhile. I think I ought to bathe your foot."

"You!" said Wells in dismay, and looking more astonished than he had at anything yet. "As if I should allow you to do such a thing!"

"Why not? I should think you would be very foolish not to let me. I know how; I've done it for father, by the hour. You see it soothes the pain, and makes the swelling go down. But I don't know what I could put water in. How queer it is that we can get to places where we miss all the little things that we thought we should have, of course! Now I thought I should *always* be where I could get a basin or a bowl to put water in.



"THE SEASIDE LIBRARY WOMAN."

"If the baby had drank all the milk I could use the pail. But I dare not throw it away, because he might need it before his mother gets to him."

"I should think not!" said Wells, meaning about the milk. "It cost too much to throw away."

"Yes;" said Christie gravely. "But then they did not charge me any more than other people charge for a quart of milk."

Wells' eyes danced over this; he had not meant the cost in money; but he said nothing.

Meantime Christie looked up and down the car, her face thoughtful and anxious. She was studying ways for bathing the sick foot. Wells was secretly glad that there seemed no chance for it. He would have liked his mother to do it, but he could not bear to think of having his foot bathed by this trim little girl.

Suddenly Christie hopped up, her face bright, and yet doubtful, if you can imagine the two on the same face. She saw a way to do it, if only the "Seaside Library" woman would be good and help. It was very unpleasant to have to ask a favor of her, but Christie was not one to

stop at unpleasant things, when they looked as though they ought to be done.

The lady's satchel lay open at her side on the seat. She was fumbling discontentedly through it, looking for something that she did not seem to find.

But the thing that Christie saw, was a small white pitcher, lying snugly among the napkins, empty, and waiting, apparently, for work to do.

She went over to her in haste. It would not do to take much time to think about this thing which was so disagreeable.

"Would you be so kind as to lend me the pitcher for a little while to keep baby's milk in? I want to fill the pail with water to bathe the lame foot. It is beginning to swell very much, and I think that will help it. Mother thought it helped father."

A long speech for Christie. The lady looked so *very* disagreeable that the child felt a nervous desire to keep on talking, and not give her a chance to make a disagreeable answer. But she came to the end of her long sentence at last, and waited.

Wells was laughing. He was almost willing

to have his ankle bathed, if it would in any way add to the discomfort of the lady.

For what seemed to poor Christie several long minutes, she stared at her as though she were some unpleasant curiosity that had not been seen before, then said: "I suppose so. What a set I have got among! The insolent boy doesn't deserve to have his ankle bathed! If he had been sitting in the cars as he ought the accident would not have happened. Why can't you throw that slop of milk away, if you want the pail?"

Christie meekly explained her fears that the baby might fancy himself hungry when he awoke; and at last, with a disgusted sigh, the lady took the delicate china pitcher from its nest and passed it into Christie's keeping.

"Here," she said. "You will break it, I presume, the next thing; and it belongs to a set. I was a simpleton to bring it, but how was I to know there would be such a nuisance of a time?"

"Oh, thank you!" said Christie. "I will be very careful of it." And she tripped away with a relieved face.

The old gentleman was watching. When the milk was carefully poured into the china pitcher,

what did he do but offer to take care of it!

Very grateful was Christie, for while she poured, she had wondered what she should do with ' . . . frail china thing, in order to keep it from bumping against the car. To be sure there was no motion now, but there was always the hope that the cars would start.

Next the pail must be washed. For the first time in her life, Christie made her way to the water cooler, which stood in a corner of the car, and managed to learn how to make the water flow. Washing the pail was an easy matter. It was a relief to come to something that she knew just how to do, and had often done before.

She was soon at her work, a neat handkerchief doing duty as a bathing cloth. The sock was carefully, tenderly drawn from the poor swollen foot—not without help from Wells' knife, for the ankle was by this time very unwilling to be touched—and the bathing began. At first Wells' face had a flush on it that was not all caused by pain. It was such a queer thing to have a little girl, and she a stranger to him, bathing his foot. But the cold water felt so pleasant, and the touch of the small hand was so

gentle and skilful, that gradually a feeling of relief and satisfaction began to steal over him.

"I did not know there was so much good in water," he said, watching her as she steadily passed her cool cloth up and down the foot.

"Water is real wonderful," said Christie. "Mother says that half the people in the world don't know what a splendid doctor it is. Sometimes she uses it real hot, and it will stop a pain in a few minutes. Hot water would be good for your foot if we could get some. I wish we could, for I am most sure that it would make this swelling go down faster."

"We might split some pieces off the side of the car, and start a fire. I could whittle some off, maybe, or the old gentleman would. No, he can't leave his pitcher of milk. But the young man hasn't anything to do; we might try him. I have some matches in my pocket."

By this time he had to stop and laugh over the bewildered look on the little nurse's face.

"I beg your pardon," he said, seeing the flushed cheeks. "I'm afraid it sounds like making fun of you, and that is the last thing I am thinking of, I can tell you. I was only thinking that you had done so many things

to-day that seemed impossible, perhaps you would manage a fire, to heat water. You can't think how nice the cold water feels. I hate to have you down there mussing over me. You are getting drops of water all over your pretty dress. I'm afraid among us we shall manage to spoil all your clothes. But my foot feels fifty per cent. better. I can tell you somebody who will be very much obliged to you for this morning's work, and that's my mamma."

Said Christie, "Isn't it nice that the baby sleeps all this while? If he should waken before I get your foot bandaged, I don't know what I should do!"

The distressed tone of motherly anxiety in which she said this, set Wells off into another laugh. He thought her the strangest little girl he had ever seen in his life. The truth was, that he was not acquainted with any little girls who knew how to do things which are supposed to belong to women. But Christie had been her mother's oldest daughter, and her only helper in the home for so many years, that she had learned many things, and had a fashion of planning beforehand, very much as her mother did.

JOHNNY, WHO LIVED AT MR. BRIGGS'.



“Bandaged!” repeated Wells when his laugh was over. “Why what will you bandage it with? I should say that was about as hard to manage as a fire.”

“Oh, no! I didn’t know what you meant about making a fire. I’m sure there is fire enough in the stove; if I could make a place on the stove to set this pail I could have hot water; but I really *can’t* do that. A bandage, though, from somewhere we *must* have. You see the foot must be bandaged now that it has been wet; mother thinks they swell more after wetting, unless they are bound up pretty tight. I have one other handkerchief, but it is small; still it would make a beginning, and I suppose you have one, and the old gentleman maybe has two, men often have; I think we can get enough to make quite a nice bandage.”

“Are you really going through the car to take up a collection of handkerchiefs for my benefit!”

Wells was so amused that he could hardly speak the words, but Christie looked perfectly sober.

“Why not?” she said. “Anybody who had one would give it for such a thing, you know.

And it is really necessary. Mother was *very* particular about it when father had a sprain."

"Well! I suppose you will do it. I think you would do anything that it happened to come into your head ought to be done; but I beg you to ask each of the contributors for their addresses, for I shall want to express a few handkerchiefs to them, if this train ever *does* reach the city."

In due course of time Christie did just that thing. She went timidly over to the old gentleman, and told him her plan. She did not like to do it, but it seemed the next thing to be done, and as she walked along, she remembered that she had not liked to do one of the things that had come to her since she stopped the train; yet they had all turned out well, so far. Even the china pitcher was doing its duty as nicely as though its owner had been willing to lend it.

The old gentleman was delightful. He shook out two of the largest and finest cambric handkerchiefs that Christie had ever seen. It did seem a pity to tear them, but he gave them up as though it was a pleasure to him to think of their being torn in bits.

The young man was equally ready, and more

able, for he opened his case, and produced three or four, which Christie saw with joy, for she need not now go to the owner of the pitcher.

"How are you going to fasten the pieces?" he asked as he spread out the handkerchiefs and prepared to help tear them. "Pins will scratch, and besides will not make a smooth bandage. Take care, you are getting that one too wide; bandages are nuisances unless they fit nicely. What shall we do about the sewing? I suppose you haven't a workbox with you?"

"Not quite," said Christie, laughing, and feeling as though she were well acquainted with him, "but I have something that will do to sew bandages. I had a necktie to hem for father, and I took it along for work to-day at my uncle's. The only trouble is it is black silk, and I ought to have white thread, but it will do."

"Of course it will do," her new friend said heartily. "Did you ever read fairy stories? There is one about a little woman who had in her pocket, or her mouth, or her shoes, somewhere about her, just the thing that was wanted next. I didn't know that fairies travelled on the cars, but I believe you must be her cousin at least."

"I wonder if you would like some help in putting this bandage on? I have done such things before now, and I think perhaps my hands are a little stronger than yours."

"Oh!" said Christie, relieved, and smiling, "I am *so* glad. I didn't know how it would get on. I tried once to bandage father's foot, and I did not do it well at all; but I thought I must do the best I could this time, and maybe it would last until he got to the city. Are you a doctor, sir?"

"Not quite; I am only studying, with the hope of being one sometime. You did not know you were a teacher as well as a fairy, did you?"

"I?" said Christie, looking greatly astonished.

"You. I have been watching you all the morning, and I concluded just now, that it was time I roused myself and began to think of something besides my own great disappointment. I suppose I shall reach the city just as soon if I help bandage that foot as though I sat here and looked at my watch, and longed for the train to start."

The sentence ended with a little sigh, and

the anxious look came back to his pale face as he skilfully rolled the bandage into a hard little ball.

“I am very sorry for you,” said Christie gently; “I do hope you will get to the city in time! and I can’t help thinking that you will.”

There was such a confident little note in her voice that he glanced at her curiously.

“Do your fairy powers reach in that direction?” he asked, smiling just a little. “Could you wave your wand, do you think, and make this train start on its way?”

She shook her head, smiling, yet with a serious mouth.

“Nobody ever thought of such a thing as calling me a fairy; I’m only Christie Tucker; but I prayed to God to let you get to the city as quick as he could, and to let your friend get well. And I cannot help thinking that he will do it. I *know* he will if it is best.”

“How did you find that out?”

“Why,” said Christie, puzzled how to answer this, yet feeling that it ought to be answered, “of course He will. He said so, you know. Or, well, he said so about some people. Are not you one of them, sir?”

"One of whom?"

"One of the people who love God? He said he would make everything come just right to the people who love him. And he never breaks a promise, you know."

"Look here, little woman, that lady over there who is tearing a letter into bits, has not been very polite to you I have noticed, and I suppose she doesn't love you nearly as well as your mother does, for instance: but suppose you knew that her sister was very sick, and that she was anxious to get to her; if you could, wouldn't you make this train go on as fast as possible, so as to give her a chance to get to the city?"

"Yes, sir," said Christie unhesitatingly, "I would, of course."

"Then you are better than God? You see he doesn't do it."

Christie considered this for a moment, then said:

"But I might make a dreadful mistake. Perhaps two trains would run into each other, or it might be all wrong in some way. You see, God knows how to do things, and I don't."

"Ah, but if you knew *how* to do things, you

could plan so that it would all come out best. This is what you say God does for those who love him, and I am showing you that you would do it for those who don't love you, and are therefore making yourself out to be better than God. Don't you see?"

Christie looked distressed. What she saw, was, that this man needed to have somebody explain things to him. He did not disturb her faith, but how was she going to show him that God was good to all?

She thought it over in silence, while he still rolled at the bandage, which showed a perverse desire to twist, and needed care from her watchful fingers all the time.

At last she said timidly, "I know there is a way to explain, but I don't know how to do it. If you knew our minister, he could tell you. Don't you think, though, that some people won't *let* God do the best for them? He wants them to choose to love him, and then he can take care of them and see that everything comes out all right. Our minister told me about it. There was a little boy living at Mr. Briggs, that came all the way from the Home for Little Wanderers in New York. Mr. Briggs took him

to work on the farm. His name is Johnnie, and our minister said: 'What if Johnnie should run away, and refuse to live with Mr. Briggs, could he be taken care of as he would have been if he had stayed with the man who had promised him a home?' He said a great deal more, and made it real plain. If you could talk with him, I know he could make you understand: but I am only a little girl."

"You are a very good little girl," he said gently, "and whether I understand things as you do or not, I thank you for praying for me. That will not do me any harm, I am sure. Now we will go and see about fitting the bandage to that sick foot."

Skilful fingers soon had the foot more comfortable than it had been since the accident. Wells submitted to the new helper meekly, though he made a wry face at Christie behind the piece of handkerchief that was left from the bandage.

"I don't know about liking that man," he said to Christie when the foot was nicely done up and resting on the cushions of the turned seat. "He might have walked up before and helped you with that baby. He must have seen that it was a tug for you."

"Men don't know about babies," Christie answered gravely, "but I am glad that he knows about bandages. How nicely he did that! It looks just as though a doctor had been here. Well, he is a doctor."

"The mischief, he is! Then I ought to have offered to pay him."

"Oh, no!" said Christie, distressed, "I don't believe he would have liked that. He did it for kindness, not for pay. He is very pleasant, but just as sad! He gives very long sighs, right in the midst of his talk. I am sorry for him; sorrier than before he helped us."

"Why?"

"Because I am afraid he doesn't believe in God. He is not one of God's people, I'm most sure: because they never talk in that way, and it makes things a great deal harder to bear."

"Talk in what way? How do you tell people of that kind?"

"Why, he almost found fault with God! Talked as though he did not believe that God would do the best for everybody. And you know his children never say such things."

"Don't they? I'm sure I did not know it. I guess I am not acquainted with many of

them. I'll tell you what it is, Christie, I have a brother whom I would like to have you make understand things if you could. He is sick and lame, and will never be any better ; and he got so by helping somebody else: doing his duty, you know. It would be hard work for you to make him believe that things are just right in this world. He thinks it is awful that he doesn't get well. And I must say it seems most too bad. He was a splendid scholar, you see, led his class in college and was going to make a great man, people thought ; now it is all spoiled, and he suffers all the time, and will have to, as long as he lives."

"What hurt him?" asked Christie, her eyes full of sympathy and sorrow.

"Why, a house was burning, and he climbed a ladder when nobody else would, and went inside, and saved a little baby: and part of the wall fell on him and hurt his back. The doctor says he will never be any better."

Christie's tears came outright now.

"I'm so sorry for him!" she said; "but if he only knew God, it would be a great deal easier to bear."

What a long, long, morning it was! The baby



"IT IS SARAH ANN!"

had his nap out, and awoke and fretted a good deal, and cried outright for his mamma, and drank some more milk, and played with the old gentleman's gold headed cane, and went over to the pale-faced young man and was entertained for a while, and cried some more, and was given a cookie, and at last fell asleep again. And there that train stood immovable. It began to be certain now, that there was serious trouble. Word came, through the railroad men, that the track was injured a long distance ahead, and for that reason no train could get out from the city to relieve them.

To add to the dreariness, it began to rain; a fierce, driving storm, and of course the mud grew deeper every moment.

"Dear, dear!" said Christie; "I hope they don't know about it at home. Mother will be so worried that she won't know what to do."

"It's most a wonder that your people let you start out," said Wells. "I suppose the morning papers gave an account of the mischief done by the rain in the night: but our folks are all away, and I, like an idiot, never looked at a paper."

Then Christie, her cheeks somewhat red, explained that they did not take a daily paper,

that father couldn't quite afford it yet, and so they had known nothing about trouble on the railroad.

"There is always some trouble with this road," said Wells, feeling cross. "First it is a freshet, and then a land slide, or a washout, or the engine gives out. I don't know how many times we have been detained, but never so long as this. I should like to know what we are to do for some dinner? I know I am as hungry as a wolf. I didn't eat much breakfast this morning; it was so sort of stupid to be sitting in that great dining-room all alone."

It was after twelve o'clock when this remark was made. The patience of everybody in the car was exhausted, and Christie was beginning to look anxiously at the dribble of milk left in the pitcher. What should she do if the train did not start soon, or the mother come?

"That doctor of yours will have to plunge through the mud and get us some more milk, or something," said Wells at last, trying to raise himself on his elbow to get a view of the rainy world.

"What object is that!" he said as he drew back his head. "Look, Christie, there are two of

them, and they are dragging a basket between them that must be decidedly heavy. How are they ever going to get through that puddle of water? And where are they bound for, do you suppose?"

Said Christie, "It is Sarah Ann!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A COLLATION SERVED.

SURE enough! there she came, plodding through the mud which had grown much deeper since morning.

The large basket that she carried seemed to weigh her down, and she made slow progress.

“Dear, dear!” said Christie. “One of them ought to have had Josiah’s boots. I don’t know how they will ever manage to get through the puddles. Look, baby! If you were a man, you would go right out and try to help them, wouldn’t you?”

Nobody took this hint, and the two floundered along, and climbed the high step of the car platform; then Sarah Ann set down her basket, and looked curiously in at the door.

“What do you want?” asked a brakeman

who appeared just then, sticking his head out of the door.

Sarah Ann spoke up boldly :

"We want the girl with the baby, who saved Jimmy from getting burned to death ; mother sent her her dinner, and some things for the rest, if she's a mind to give 'em to 'em."

This was bewildering news to the brakeman. He looked from the girl to the woman, with a puzzled face. He understood the word "dinner," and there was certainly a baby on the train ; but who was Jimmy, and when was he saved from burning to death ?

However, Wells Burton understood, and came to the rescue :

"It is all right, brakeman, several things have happened since you went for a walk. The party to whom that dinner belongs is here, and I'm inclined to think that a good many people who feel the pangs of hunger, wish they were friends of hers."

Such fun as it was to unpack that basket !

Christie did not know before that so many things could be crowded into a basket. Bread and butter, piles of it, a soup-plate piled high with slices of ham, thin, and done to a crisp,

and smelling, oh, so appetizing! sheets of gingerbread, great squares of cheese, a bowl of doughnuts, another bowl of quince sauce, and a pail full of milk.

"Mother said you could give some to anybody you pleased," explained Sarah Ann, who seemed to have recovered her spirits; "she said father wouldn't grudge anything to the girl who saved Jimmy from getting hurt. My! but I was scared!" she added confidentially. "Whose baby is that? Isn't he your little brother? What makes him so good with you if he don't belong? Jimmy would yell awful if a strange girl took him. My sakes! I hope his mother will find him. Do you mean to keep him always if she doesn't, and bring him up for yours? Wouldn't that be funny, for a little girl like you to adopt a baby! Oh, wouldn't it?"

What a tongue Sarah Ann had!

Wells was laughing immoderately, and pretending that it was a violent cough, to save Sarah Ann's feelings, and no peony was ever so brilliant as Christie's cheeks.

She tried to thank the girl for her kindness, but no words seemed to come at her call. However, Sarah Ann was too much interested in all

that she saw around her, to mind whether she was thanked or not. She next gave attention to Wells.

"Is that your brother?" and then without waiting for an answer, "why didn't he come after the milk? Oh, my! a sprain is a real mean thing, sometimes. Jed Barker sprained his foot, last summer, and he had to have it cut off."

After this cheering bit of news, the girl who had had her head in the oven when Christie was there, and who had been standing at one side of the door, peeping in in an abashed way, now found voice:

"Sarah Ann, you'd ought to be ashamed! Your ma told you not to let your tongue get to running. Come out here, and let her eat her dinner, and then you can git the dishes."

"I ain't said nothing," declared Sarah Ann, looking aggrieved.

However, she turned quickly and went out to the platform.

"There's a rare specimen of a girl for you!" said Wells. "She's a genius, I should say. Does Jimmy look like her? If he does, I don't wonder that you saved his life."

"I don't think she means to do anything wrong," said Christie hesitatingly. "It is just because she doesn't know any better. It must have been very hard work to carry this basket through the mud."

"Wrong!" exclaimed Wells, "I should say not! On the contrary, she is the only one of this crowd, yourself excepted, who has done anything right since we started. Does your mother enjoy having you say, 'this crowd,' when you mean half a dozen people? Mine considers it slang, and I never say it any more, except on special occasions."

"I never say it at all," answered Christie, laughing.

During this time she had been engaged in unpacking the basket, and now had the contents arranged neatly on a large clean towel which she brought out of the flowered carpet sack. How nice it was that mother had wrapped the cookies first in a towel! What would she think if she knew it was doing duty as a tablecloth, and that her Christie was serving dinner for half a dozen hungry strangers!

I don't suppose that bread and butter and ham ever tasted better. The old gentleman



THE OTHER GIRL PEEPING IN.

declared that he was sure there never was any so good before, and the pale young man ate quite a large piece of bread, and smiled in gratitude; and several men, who with gloomy faces, and hands in their pockets, strayed in from the different cars, accepted Christie's offer of a ham sandwich with surprise and thanks.

"Would you offer some to the lady?" Christie asked in a whisper of Wells, glancing doubtfully in her direction.

"What, the *Seaside Library* creature? I beg that you will not misuse language so badly as to call her a lady. I should say that I wouldn't do any such thing. You would probably get refused for your pains. Such a delicate person as she never eats anything more solid than a bit of ice-cream, and a little pound cake, you may be sure."

But Christie did not laugh. Instead, she looked troubled, and after awhile thoughtfully laid aside a delicate bit of ham, and a thin slice of bread and butter. Diving down into her satchel again, she brought out a piece of an old tablecloth, beautifully clean and white; the seed cakes for uncle Daniel's baby had been wrapped in it. On this white cloth she laid the bread

and butter, two of the seed cakes, a delicate piece of gingerbread, and a fragment of cheese.

"I'm going to carry these to her," she said to Wells, inclining her head as she spoke in the direction of the lady.

"She won't take them."

"I can't help it. I shall feel ashamed of myself if I don't offer them, and I don't like to feel ashamed of myself."

"There is something in that," Wells said, laughing, yet with a look in his eyes, that said he was proud of Christie. "Go ahead; I'll keep watch and be ready to defend you, if she is inclined to bite."

And Christie went. She had done her best, and the food certainly did not look uninviting, but the lady had worked herself by this time into such a state of disgust, that I think it would have been very hard for her to be good.

She gave one disdainful glance at the ragged edges of the piece of tablecloth, then shook her head: "No, thank you. I am not reduced to that state yet."

Then, seeing the flaming color in Christie's cheeks, she seemed to struggle to make herself behave better.

"I'm not afraid of you, child," she said, "you look neat, I am sure ; but after seeing the hands and hair of the girl who brought the basket, I could not eat a mouthful."

Not a word said Christie. She carried her bit of tablecloth back, and laid it on the seat, covering the food from the dust ; her eyes, meantime, swimming with tears.

"How long does it take people to starve?" Wells asked fiercely of the old gentleman who was in the act of biting a huge piece of ham.

Evidently he understood Wells' meaning, and smiled. But Christie could not smile.

Baby, meantime, was in rollicking humor. Apparently he had resolved that his mother was not worthy of any more tears, or frettings, and he kept one pretty arm around Christie's neck, and ate seed cakes, and drank milk, with delight.

On the whole, it was a very nice dinner, and the different people who came from the other car and shared it, all agreed that "Sarah Ann" ought to have a vote of thanks.

"I'll tell you what will be better than that," said the old gentleman, putting his hand in his pocket ; "at least we can add it to the thanks, and make her happy. Let us take up a nice

little collection for her to get herself a pair of rubber boots to climb through the mud in," and he dropped a shining gold bit into Christie's hand.

"And a comb to comb her hair with," added Wells as he laid a silver dollar beside the gold piece; "you advise her to buy one, Christie, that's a good girl."

The rough-looking men seemed equally pleased with the idea, and dropped their fifty cent pieces into the eager little hand, and the pale young man actually added another gold piece.

I wish you could have seen Christie's eyes, as her hand began to grow full! It seemed to her that she was never so happy in her life. It was so splendid to give people things; she had never had that pleasure before.

"I haven't any money," she said softly to Wells, "but I am so glad that the rest of you have; and it is so nice in you to let me give it to her. Just think what a lot of nice things it will buy her! I know they are poor by the looks of the kitchen. I think it was real good in them to send us dinner."

"So it was; and it was real good of the woman to be such an excellent cook. I haven't

had a better dinner in a long time ; but I say, Christie, what are you saving that choice bit in the cloth for ? You don't mean to relent and let the baby have it after all ! ”

“ No ; ” said Christie laughing, “ baby must be content with seed cakes, and milk ; I know his mamma does not let him eat ham, and I am not going to run the risk ; but I thought I would keep that, for a little while. ”

The remainder of the milk had been carefully poured into what Wells called “ the company pitcher, ” to be kept for baby ; and Christie went with basket and money out to Sarah Ann on the platform.

Just as she came back with her eyes full of the story of the girl's dumb surprise, a lady was opening the opposite door and coming down the aisle. A middle-aged lady, elegantly dressed, and with a placid smile on her face.

“ I thought I must come and look after the little fairy who so kindly furnished us with a dinner, ” she said brightly. “ Is this the one ? My child, you did not know I had some of your dinner, did you ? but that patient brakeman out there, shared his slice of bread and ham with me, and told me the whole story. I want to see

the baby. If I had heard of him before, I should have come and tried to help. Yes ; I have been sitting in that next car all the time ; but I was so stupid as to go to sleep and lose most of the excitements. Why, Wells Burton ! I wonder if you are here ? ”

“ Yes'm ; ” said Wells briskly, “ I'm here, Mrs. Haviland ; but I did not know that you were. Did you go to sleep before the accident and the stopping of the train ? ”

“ No, indeed ! I stayed awake for that excitement, and heard all about it, and the forethought of this little woman, but you see I did not know it was *you*, and there seemed to be so many crowding in, and nothing to do but stare, that I thought I wouldn't join them. And so it was you who were hurt ? My dear boy, how distressed your mother must be ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Haviland, bending over him pityingly. “ Where is she, and all the rest of them, and how is it that you are spending Christmas day on the cars ? ”

There seemed no end to the questions that the handsome lady had to ask. Christie, meantime, was engaged in watching the “ Seaside Library woman,” as I am afraid that lady will

have to be called for the rest of the story. The moment that the stranger had exclaimed :

“Why, Wells Burton !” the lady had given a sudden surprised start, and her face had flushed deeply. At least she knew the *name*, if she did not the boy, and for some reason, the knowledge seemed to disturb her.

Just then the stranger turned in her direction, and bowed slightly as some people do when they know persons a little bit, and do not care to know them any better.

Wells noticed the bow, and was ready with questions.

“Mrs. Haviland, I wonder if you are acquainted with that creature. Who is she ?”

“My dear boy, have you been travelling with her all day, without knowing who she is ? Did you ever hear of a person by the name of Henrietta Westville ?”

“I should think I had ! You don’t say that she is the one !”

“That is her name, my boy.”

“Well ! I wonder that I had not thought of it for myself. The name fits her character precisely. Of all the cantankerous, disgusting creatures that I ever saw, she ” —

"Softly, softly, my dear Wells, what would 'mother' say to such language as that?"

"I don't care," declared Wells, "the language doesn't begin with the subject. Mamma is reasonable. She knows that a fellow has to boil over once in a while. Why, Mrs. Haviland, you never heard the like of the way in which she has conducted herself to-day."

And then Wells launched out in a description of the conduct of the "Seaside Library creature," and Christie took the sleepy baby to a seat on the other side of the car to soothe him to sleep, and to wonder who this lady was, and why Wells cared because the young woman was named Henrietta Westville, and what he was telling the stranger about herself, for at this moment she overheard her own name.

CHAPTER IX.

A NICE TALK.

THE baby went to sleep, and the strange lady continued talking with Wells. So Christie, feeling a little lonely after so much excitement, looked about her for amusement, and discovered that the nice old gentleman was motioning to her.

"Come and take care of me awhile, little woman," he said, making room for her. "Between us we can catch the baby before he makes up his mind to roll away. You must be tired looking after him. I wish his mother knew what good care he had."

"I am used to it," explained Christie. "I take a great deal of care of our baby; but I am sorry for his mother!"

Christie meant the mother of the baby on the cars, not the baby at home.

The old gentleman understood her.

"It is bad business," he said cheerily; "but not so bad but it might have been worse. Suppose, for instance, you had not been on the cars, what would baby have done then? For that matter, what would any of us have done without our dinner? That was an excellent dinner you got up for us. How have you enjoyed the day, on the whole?"

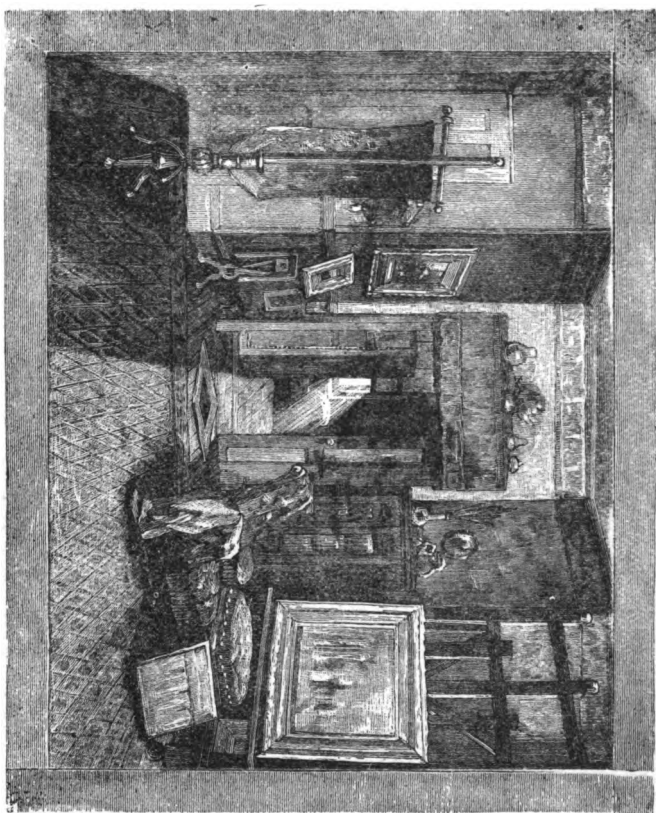
"Why," said Christie laughing, "I haven't had time to think. It isn't a bit such a day as I had planned."

"I imagine not. Mine isn't, I know. Let us hear what you had planned, and see if your expectations were any like mine."

"Oh, no!" said Christie; "they couldn't be! Why, in the first place, I was to take my first ride on the cars. Well, I have done that, though we didn't ride very far before we stopped."

"Just so; and we seem to find it hard work to get on again. I wonder if this is your first ride! Well, well! you will not be likely to forget it, will you? And where were you going?"

"Why, I expected to spend all this day at my uncle Daniel's in the city! I have never been



UNCLE DANIEL'S PARLOR.

there, you know, and he lives in a nice house, and has a great many things that I wanted to see."

"Do you mind telling me the thing that you wanted to see the most?"

A shy little blush came into Christie's face, and she drooped her head.

"It was very silly, I suppose, but I wanted to see the carpet in the parlor. It is what they call Brussels, and has ferns all over it, so natural that mother says you could most pick them; and some berries like what mother used to gather in the woods where she lived, away off East. I never saw such a carpet, and I can't think what it would be like. It doesn't seem to me that they could make natural-looking ferns out of threads of wool; and I wanted to see if I should think so. Then she has pretty furniture in her room, all painted in flowers — roses, you know — and pansies, and oh! a great many flowers and vines, just lovely! I never saw anything like that, either; and I couldn't think how they would look."

The old gentleman got out his only remaining handkerchief, and drew it across his mouth, to hide a smile that he did not want Christie to see;

and then drew it across his eyes, for something in her voice seemed to make the tears start.

"I understand," he said, his voice full of kindly sympathy; "and so these were the things that you most wanted to see?"

"No, sir," said Christie; "not quite. I thought a good deal about them; but there was one thing that I thought I should look at more than anything else, and maybe touch."

There was a curious little note of awe in her voice as she said these last words that made her listener bend his head curiously, and question in tones of deepest interest:

"What was that?"

"A piano."

She spoke the words almost under her breath.

"My dear child! did you never see a piano?"

"Oh, no, sir. My mother has, often. She used to play on one when she was a girl, and she has told me about it often, and *often*. I think I know just how it looks. I can shut my eyes and see it; and I can think a little how it sounds; at least, it seems as though I could. It isn't like the carpet. I can't imagine that; but the music is easier. Father has a flute. We have a carpet, of course," she added, drawing

herself up with a bit of womanly dignity, "but it is made of rags, and looks very different from Brussels, mother says. And I can't imagine a very great difference in *carpets*,* but I can imagine things about music, you know."

"I know," nodded the old gentleman; and he thought to himself that he knew several things which she didn't.

After a little he said :

"And so you are missing all these wonders; but a good many interesting things have happened, I should think?"

Then did Christie's eyes sparkle.

"I should think there had!" she said. "I was thinking just a little while ago that I should have enough to tell mother and father and Karl all the rest of the winter. We have only a few books, and we have to tell things to each other, instead of reading. Father said I was to keep my eyes open to-day, and I guess he will think I have."

This last she said with a happy little laugh.

"I guess he will," declared the old gentleman, "and I hope he will understand to what good purpose you have done it. What did you expect to see in the city that would interest you?"

"Oh, I didn't know. A very great many things, I suppose; but I couldn't imagine them. Only one: one day father, when he was in the city, saw the Governor of the State; you know he lives there. And to go to uncle Daniel's, we ride past his house; and I thought, maybe, he might be in the door, as he was when father went by, and I would see him. Father says he is a splendid-looking man, and he is a grand temperance man, you know, and I wanted just to have a glimpse of him; but I don't suppose I shall."

Then the old gentleman took out his handkerchief and used it vigorously on nose, and eyes, and even mouth.

"He isn't at home to-day," he said at last.

"Isn't he?"

There was real disappointment in Christie's voice. It was evident that she had not quite given up her glimpse of the Governor.

"No; but you needn't care now, after having had such a nice chance to look at him, and even talk with him."

You should have seen Christie's face then. For a moment she was quite pale with bewilderment.

"I don't understand you," she said timidly, and in her heart she wondered whether the nice old gentleman was a little crazy.

"Why, my dear child, it is a good while since morning, I know, but my memory is good, and I distinctly remember seeing you sit up straight in that seat over there beside the Governor of the State, and heard him talking to you in what seemed to be a very interesting way."

Christie sat up straight now, her eyes glowing like two stars, her small hands clasped together, and her voice with such a ring of wondering delight in it that Wells stopped in the middle of his sentence to look over at her.

"Really and truly?"

That was all she said.

"Really and truly. I saw it with my own eyes. And a grand man he is; worth knowing."

Not another word said Christie for the space of two minutes. Then she drew a long, fluttering sigh of delight, and murmured: "What a thing to tell father and mother and Karl."

"You like to see people of importance, do you?" the old gentleman asked, after watching

her face in amused silence for a few minutes.

"Oh, so very much! People who are grand, and splendid, and worth knowing."

"Then I suppose you would have been interested in one of the Governor's children, for instance, even if you did not know the boy; just for the sake of his father?"

"Yes, indeed, I should. But he didn't have any boy with him this morning."

"No; I was thinking of myself, and of my father, and wondering whether you would not be interested in me for his sake."

Christie thought to herself that she was interested in him for his own sake, but she did not like to say this, so she waited expectantly for what would come next.

"The truth is, I belong to a very noble family: old and grand in every way. It would be impossible to get any higher in rank than my brother is."

Christie heard this with wondering awe, and looked timidly into the pleasant face beaming on her. She said to herself that she had thought all the time there was something perfectly splendid about him, but it had not occurred to her that he belonged to such very grand people.

UNCLE DANIEL'S HOUSE.



"My brother is a king," he said, still smiling. Then Christie's heart began to beat loud and fast. A king! What a wonderful experience was this! She, Christie Tucker, talking with the brother of a king! In what country, she wondered? And oh, what wonderful stories he could tell her if she only dared ask! Why didn't he wear something that would show his rank? She thought they always did. She was burning with eagerness to have him go on, yet dared not question.

"Are you surprised?" he asked her, and then the next thing he said almost took away her breath.

"Do you know I believe you are a relation of mine? I have been watching you all day, and I see a strong likeness to our family. There are certain things about us which are very much alike, and as we are scattered all over the world, I often find relatives. I believe you are one. In fact, unless I am very much mistaken, you are a little sister of the King. Do you know what I mean; and isn't it so?"

Down went Christie's head, drooping lower and lower, until her face was buried in her two hands and she was wiping away the tears.

Wells stopped again, and looked over somewhat fiercely at her companion, but the face that was raised in a moment was bright with smiles. Christie understood.

"I didn't, at first," she said; "but now I do. Oh, you mean King Jesus! Yes, sir, I belong. I thought you *truly* meant that you had a brother who was a king."

"And I certainly truly mean it, and glory in it, as I could not in anything else. You cannot think how pleased I have been to find a new little sister, and to see that she was copying my elder brother so faithfully, that she began to look like Him. It is all very well to be a governor, and I am proud of our good one; but after all, what is he compared to the King whose subjects we are? Did you ever think, my dear, how many relatives we have whom we have never met? What a wonderful getting acquainted there will be when we all meet in the palace!"

"I never thought of it in that way," said Christie; "it is beautiful."

"Then there is another thing: the family resemblance is so striking that if you watch long enough, you are almost sure to learn who be-

long to it. Do you think that pale young man is a member of our family?"

Christie looked over at him thoughtfully, then shook her head.

"No sir, I don't think he is. Why, from some things he has said, I know he isn't."

"Poor man! Do you suppose he has been invited to join us?"

"Why, yes sir, I suppose so, a good many times."

"And has refused! That is strange, isn't it? Look here, he will accept somebody's invitation, won't he, if he ever gets home to the King's palace? What if it should be yours? That would be a thing to tell the King, some day, wouldn't it?"

Christie's face glowed, but she made no answer.

"Then there is that handsome boy. I have been thinking about him. I am not sure, but am almost afraid that he does not belong, either."

"No, sir," said Christie, "he doesn't."

"There is certainly a great deal for you and me to do right in this car," the old gentleman said, and added, "what about the young lady;

is she acquainted with Him, do you think?"

"No, indeed," said Christie, a touch of scorn in her voice. "It is easy enough to see that. I think she shows it all the time."

"Ah, I don't know! Have you never disguised yourself for a whole day so that nobody would have imagined that you were a member of the royal family?"

"Yes, sir," said Christie humbly, "I have."

"Still, I am afraid as you say, that she does not know Him. It would be dreadful if, through any neglect of yours or mine, she failed of ever making his acquaintance."

Whereupon the baby awoke, and Christie went with haste to save his precious head from the bumping that he seemed determined to give it; but she could not get away from the words of her old new friend.

What if she ought to invite the pale young man, and the disagreeable young lady, to join the family circle? She did not mind talking with Wells, now, but these others were different.

By and by Mrs. Haviland bade Wells good-by, and went back to her car, and he motioned Christie to his side.

"I've discovered something about my fine lady," he said, a fierce look in his eyes; "I'll tell you about it, and you will see that it is not strange that she is so hateful; it belongs to her nature. You know I was telling you of my sick brother? Well, before he was injured, he was engaged to that very hateful young woman over there. Isn't that horrid? After the fire, and it was found that he would be a cripple all his life, what did she do but write that she was sorry for him, but she never could think of marrying a cripple. Yes," he said in answer to Christie's look of horror, "she did just that. Why my brother cared, is more than I can imagine; but he did: it made him sick again, and he has never been so well, and never will be. I never saw her before, and don't want to again. I have heard enough about her, and I am sure her actions all match."

But this story had a very different effect on Christie from what Wells had supposed. .

"I am sorry for her now," she said. "I think maybe she feels unhappy all the time, and that makes her cross. When things go all wrong, it makes some people very cross and ugly, and they can't seem to help it. One time when

Karl was sick, and I was afraid he was going to die, I felt cross all the time. Maybe she likes your brother very much, and feels so sorry for what she has done, that she cannot be good and happy."

"She may be as *good* as she likes," Wells said sourly, "but I am sure she deserves never to be happy again."

"She must be very hungry," said Christie thoughtfully. "By and by I mean to offer her a seed cake. The dirty-faced little girl had nothing to do with that, and I know it is clean; maybe she can eat it."

"You're a queer party," Wells said. "If I had been treated as you have, I think I should dislike her enough to keep my distance."

"Oh, it isn't that! I suppose I dislike her—well, a good deal. But I want to get over it, and what you told me helps me to. I want to feel sorry for her, and ask her to be a Christian. You see, she isn't a Christian, and that makes all the trouble. If she would get right about that, it would make everything else straight. Anyway, I ought to invite her, because Jesus told me to, you know; and if I give her a seed cake, maybe I can do it better."

"Humph!" said Wells, twisting himself around until he hurt his foot, and made deep frowns come on his forehead.

He really did not know what to think of Christie.

CHAPTER X.

HOW IT ENDED.

LITTLE by little that weary afternoon wore away. The rain fell steadily, and the mud grew deeper every minute; and the grumblings of some of the people grew louder, though all the while their courage was kept up by having an official appear occasionally, to say that he "guessed they would get on now, pretty soon." Baby waked, and frolicked, and fretted, and drank milk, and was trotted, and carried, and petted, as well as Christie and the old gentleman could manage it; and the swollen foot was bathed, and all the seed cakes were eaten, and the pale young man walked *miles*, just going up and down the car, "like a caged lion," Wells said.

Christie pitied him so much, that she went over to him at last as he stood by the further door of the car, and said timidly: "I think, sir, if you would make up your mind to pray to

God, you would feel so much better! He can make it all come out right, you know, even now. Why *won't* you ask him?"

The young man turned toward her a despairing face. "If your mother should die to-day, while you are sitting here in a mud hole, waiting to get out, would it be all right?" he asked.

"I have asked him to take care of her," said Christie, with quivering lip, "and I mean to trust him; I know he can do it, and I know he will, if it is the best thing. Perhaps the lady that you want to get to, is better now."

"Perhaps my staying here in the mud all day, helped to make her better."

He said this with a very sarcastic tone, but Christie who was busy wiping her eyes, did not look at him just then, and answered gravely: "Yes, sir, perhaps so. God could make even *that* help, and I cannot keep from thinking that he has made it all right. I have prayed about it a good deal, and I feel just as I always do, when things come right. I wish you would pray, dear sir."

In spite of himself, a tender smile stole over the sad face, and he looked down on her.

"How could my staying here possibly help anybody?" he asked, but his voice was more gentle.

"Oh, I don't know *how*," said Christie. "God does not tell his '*hows*,' you know; he just *does* them."

"Well," he said, after another thoughtful pause, "I'll tell you one thing, little woman, I am very much obliged to you for trying to help and comfort me. I shall not forget it. I want you to give me your address, and if things have all come out right as you say, I will write you a letter; and if our sticking in the mud for a dozen hours can be found to have helped any thing along, I will be sure to tell you."

"Thank you, sir," said Christie. "And will you pray about it?"

"Ah, that I don't know."

So after all, the "little woman" turned away sorrowfully. She wanted to give the invitation, but she was not sure that she had.

While the old gentleman was entertaining baby with his gold-headed cane, she took out the two seed cakes which she had carefully wrapped by themselves in the bit of towel, and went over to the young lady, who had her face

turned to the window, and had not looked around for more than an hour.

"Won't you please to eat these?" said Christie; "you must be very hungry. Mother made them, and she is very neat and particular."

The lady turned suddenly, and behold her eyes were wet with tears! "You are a good little thing," she said hesitatingly. "I don't think I am hungry. You would better eat them yourself."

"Oh, no," Christie answered earnestly. "I ate bread and butter. It wasn't *much* sour. I would like to have you know Jesus Christ and go to heaven. He can make you very happy."

It sounded almost rude to poor Christie, now that she had said it, but she did not know how else to put the thought. Ever since her talk with the old gentleman, she had felt that she ought to invite this lady; and she had prayed about her, until she felt very sorry for her.

"You are a strange child," said the lady; but her voice was not hard any more, and she murmured under her breath, that she was sure she needed happiness if anybody did.

Christie slipped softly away after that; but the two seed cakes were eaten, every crumb

And now there began to be a bustling of train men through the cars ; ropes were pulled, and bells were rung, and a general air of something about to happen stole over things.

"Some train is coming or going," said Wells. "I hear the rumble in the distance."

Sure enough ! It drew nearer.

"It's coming up behind us," said Wells. "Now I wonder if the next thing on the programme is to be smashed into by the afternoon express?"

And said Christie :

"Oh, I wonder if baby's mother can be on that train?"

It was not trying to smash into anything. It came up very slowly, and finally made a dead stop just below them. The passengers could be seen, getting out in the mud and rain, and making all haste to the train which was a few feet ahead of them.

"Then the bridge wasn't down?" said a passenger to a brakeman.

"No, there was a broken rail just this side of it, and the beginning of a washout, that has kept them back."

Just then the car door opened with a sudden



THE WASHOUT.

jerk. A shrill voice was heard to say in tones divided between a scream and a groan, "Where is he?" and then, "Oh, my darling, my darling!" and Christie, who was standing with her back to the door, with the baby in her arms, felt herself almost tipped over, in the dash which a richly-dressed lady made to get baby.

No sooner did he have a glimpse of her than the ungrateful fellow set up shouts of delight, and was in such a hurry to get away that he scrambled wildly over Christie's shoulder, taking a piece of her delicate ruffle in his eager hand.

Oh dear me! such a time as there was! I couldn't think of trying to describe it to you. That mother behaved herself in such a manner as to nearly drive the lookers-on frantic. She laughed, and she cried, almost both at once. She hugged the baby until he rebelled and scratched her for it. She kissed him, until he cried. Then she hugged Christie, and kissed her, until her face was too red to grow any redder. And all the time she tried to tell her wild story, and to ask a dozen questions.

"I thought there would be a despatch waiting for me at that office, and I went to see; and

that dreadful telegraph clerk kept me waiting, and the first thing I knew the train was gone! Oh, I thought I should die! I screamed and shouted; it seemed to me that the very engine would be sorry for me and stop! Mamma's poor darling! Did he cry dreadfully? I saw you, little girl, this morning, and saw you look at baby with a pleasant face, and I wondered if you would try to take care of him. Oh, such a day as this has been! O baby, baby! I'll never let you out of my arms again for a minute!"

Whereupon, baby at that moment, as if to prove to his mother how false and foolish was her promise, gave a sudden delighted spring and landed in Christie's arms again, hiding his pretty roguish head on her shoulder.

So eager were the people over all this, and such long stories had they to tell the questioning mother, that they forgot to take note of the bustle going on in the train.

Suddenly Wells waked up to it.

"I really believe we are going on again!" he said, as he watched the rapid movements of the brakeman. "Halloo, Brewster! Do you mean to take us into the city in time for bed, after all?"

"Looks like it," said the brakeman, smiling good-naturedly. "We had to wait for the mother, you know; now we've got her, we think of going on as soon as the up-train passes."

"The up-train?" said Wells. "Is it time for that? When does it come?"

"It will be along in five minutes; we are going to switch for her to pass, then on we go."

"The up-train!" echoed Christie, a sudden new dismayed thought in her heart. "Why, isn't that the six o'clock at our station?"

"The very same. This interesting day is about done."

"Well, but — that's the train I am to come home on, and father will be at the depot to meet me. Why, I've got to go home!"

"Oh, no! They will never expect you to do such a thing as that! Less than an hour now will take us into the city. We'll go kiting, when we do start. Of course your people will expect you to go on and make your visit. Have the conductor telegraph your father that you are all right; I'll see to it for you; and if your uncle isn't at the depot, I'll take a carriage and go there with you. I wouldn't give up my Christmas in this fashion."

Christie thought a moment, a world of perplexity on her face, then presently the face cleared :

"No, I thank you. I must go home ; mother said be sure to come back to-night. She didn't say a word about what I was to do if I didn't get to uncle Daniel's at all. She just said :

"And, Christie, you be sure and come home to-night, whatever happens. Don't you let them coax you to stay; tell them mother expects you. So you see, I must go back on that very train."

"Of course she must," said the old gentleman, who had been listening attentively. "She is not the sort of woman to keep her mother waiting and watching, while she goes and makes a visit."

"Well, I declare!" grumbled Wells, not convinced, and much disgusted at the thought of parting with his nurse, "that is the queerest way to make a Christmas visit that I ever heard of! Here's the train! You'll have to hurry, if you're really going to be so foolish as to go. That train doesn't stop at places long enough for a fellow to wink."

"I'll help her off," said the pale young man,

and he had his umbrella raised before she reached the platform; her flowered satchel was on his arm, and there was nothing for Christie to do but to smile her good-by to her friends in the car, and step down into the night and the darkness. A few steps in the mud, a strong hand springing her to the platform of another train, a kind voice saying, "Good-by, little woman; I'll not forget!" And Christie had parted from all the friends and acquaintances whom she seemed to have known so long and well, and was in a strange car, surrounded by strange and rather cross-looking people, and felt grown-up and lonely.

"Why, is it possible that she has gone!" exclaimed the mother of the baby, taking in the change of plan just as the car-door closed after Christie. "I thought she was going to the city. Why, I wanted to talk with her, and take care of her. What shall I do? I must have the child's address. Who knows her?"

Then up started the old gentleman:

"Bless my heart! I have let her slip away after all, without getting her address. That is too bad."

"I can help you about that," said Wells,

waking out of his ill-humor to be interested. "Her name is Christie Tucker, and her father is Mr. Jonas Tucker, a farmer who lives about two miles from Pierpont station, where she took the train this morning. She is a friend of mine," he added proudly.

I suppose Karl Tucker would have been very much amazed, could he have heard that. The world had moved much faster that day than Karl Tucker dreamed of. Or Karl Tucker's father, for the matter of that. He waited in the rain and the darkness, for his little girl. He had spent a busy day about the farm, and had heard no news. The two men whom he had met and talked with, a few minutes on his way to the cars, neither knew, nor knowing, would have cared, that there had been confusion on the railroad all day. So Mr. Tucker as he waited anxiously on the milk-platform for the coming of the up-train, only knew that it was dark and rainy, and that railroad cars were "skittish" things, and hoped that "Daniel had put his little girl in a good seat, and that she wasn't scared."

"Ha!" he said with a relieved sigh, as at last he folded her in his arms and kissed her,

"father's got you again. It's been a long day for Christmas. Come in here and let me wrap you up. We'll hurry, for it is going to rain hard, and your mother will be anxious. Karl stayed at home to do the chores. Don't talk any now, my girl, only wrap up close, and duck your head down out of the driving rain, and we'll get home in no time. Supper's waiting. A regular Christmas supper, too: though it ain't much like your dinner I s'pose."

A silvery little laugh rang out to him from behind the old shawl, and a muffled voice said she didn't believe it was. And they drove home with all speed, the rain coming thicker and faster.

How the tea-kettle sang on the bright stove, and what a supper that was! Stewed chicken, and potatoes stewed in cream, and hot apple sauce are not bad to eat at any time, if one is hungry. But when one has had only a small slice of "Sarah Ann's" bread for dinner, and has given away every one of her seed cakes, I cannot begin to tell you how good it tastes.

Then think of the story that there was to tell.

"I don't believe I can finish it before next Christmas," declared Christie, laughing, and kissing the baby for the tenth time.

"You see I have only told you the heads of the chapters, just as Karl always reads the index of his book; but when I begin to put in the little bits, it will take days and *days*. O, father, what do you think! I saw the governor, and sat with him, and talked with him!"

"Well," said father, after having heard dashes at that wonderful part of that wonderful story, "I guess you saw lots of things to-day, and it's



my opinion some other folks saw some things too. It is a great day, I think. I'm glad she was there to take care of that boy," — and here he put his arm around Karl, — "and that baby, eh, mother?" and here he kissed the baby.

"And you never went to uncle Daniel's at all!" said Mrs. Tucker, with her elbow on the table, and her hand on the teapot handle. "Well, I *am* beat!"

And so, at last, Christie's Christmas was ended.

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTIE AS HOUSEKEEPER.

IT was snow this time, instead of rain. It came down in great lovely flakes, such as filled the baby's soul with satisfaction, and kept him a silent watcher at the window for a longer time, I really believe, than Baby Tucker was ever known to be quiet before.

They were alone — Christie and Karl and the baby. Father and mother Tucker, with Nettie tucked in between them, had gone gayly off to town some two hours before, and would get themselves caught in a snowstorm. Occasionally Christie worried over this as she looked up from her darning long enough to catch a glimpse of the great flakes which were rapidly turning every ugly thing into a lovely white.

"Nettie will catch cold, I'm just afraid," she said, her voice full of a pretty motherly anxiety for the little Tucker.

Now Karl, being a boy, could not be anxious about a person who was out in such a jolly snowstorm, so was just the one to comfort.

"Oh no," he said cheerily; "if the snow gets to be too much for her, mother will duck her under the buffalo robe in a twinkling. That robe is a splendid thing to keep the snow off, if it is about worn out. I say, Christie, I don't suppose it ever snowed faster than this in New York State. Do you believe it did?"

"It may not have snowed *faster*," Christie declared, looking up from her darning with a critical eye, "but the difference is it keeps at it longer. Just think! all this lovely whiteness will be gone before to-morrow morning."

"Yes, and everything turned to slush," said Karl, in a moment of disconsolateness. "I shall have to drive to the depot through a mess of dirty pudding and milk. I tell you what it is, I should like to spend one winter where snow stayed."

"Wells Burton spent a winter in Maine once," said Christie, thus carried back to the events of that ever-memorable journey of hers, now two weeks in the distance. It required the merest nothing to take her back to the

HE HAD A SLEIGHRIDE EVERY DAY.



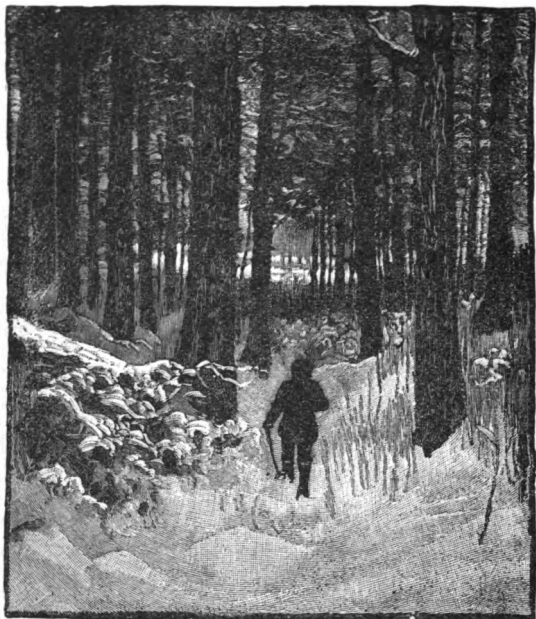
wonderful day and all its varied and beautiful, as well as troublesome experiences, and then she lingered long, while Karl, an interested listener, asked, ever and anon, the most appreciative of questions.

"He said the snow was three feet deep at one place where he spent a month. Only think of it, Karl! He took a sleighride every day, and sometimes they had to leave the road because it was drifted all full of snow, and go into the fields where a track had been broken, and they would ride right over the tops of the fences."

"Mother has told us about that often," remarked Karl in a grave tone. Without knowing it, he was slightly jealous of this new storyteller whom he did not know at all, and whom Christie quoted as if he were an old friend.

"Oh, yes, I know," Christie said soothingly. "Mother has had more wonderful sleighrides than ever Wells Burton had, and more of them. Just think of the winter when she took one the third day of November, and another on the third day of April, and could have taken them any time between! That was snow for you! But then it was a good while ago, and sometimes

it seems to me as though the world was changed now, and there wasn't so much snow as that anywhere; but Wells Burton was down there only last winter, and had these rides."



WELLS BURTON SPENT A WINTER IN MAINE.

"He has got back." Karl was whittling. He had brought some clean and delicate strips of board into the clean kitchen, and established

himself in the corner, with a large sheet of brown paper to catch his whittlings, and was prepared to take a holiday on this stormy afternoon, and visit with Christie. He was trying to make a new-fashioned work-box for his mother, with sliding compartments suited to the size of the articles to be stored within. It was a very complicated piece of work for a boy, with only his brains and a jack-knife ; but Karl had seen one at the corner store the other day, and had studied it carefully, thinking of several improvements while he stood there, waiting for his sugar ; so now he was at it, improvements and all. It was a peculiarity of Karl's that he was almost sure to think of improvements, directly he looked at a bit of work. He whittled away carefully just then, having a delicate corner to turn, and did not see the start with which Christie dropped her darning, nor the pleased look in her face, as she said :

"Has he? How do you know? When did he come back? Did he speak to you, Karl?"

"I knew it this morning, because I saw him at the depot going in for something that had been forgotten. If they want a spool of thread, they run into the city for it! Besides, I knew it

last night; Nick told me. They came yesterday; the sick young man did not like it in the city; he was homesick; so they just packed up and came, though Mrs. Burton sort of wanted to stay all winter, and thought when she went in that she could coax the young man into liking it. There's a queer thing for you; a fellow to be homesick for this little puckered-up town, when he could live in a city just as well as not! I'll bet a cent that I should never cry to come back here, if I had father and mother and all the folks worth having, along with me. Christie, what has that baby got in his mouth? He'll choke, I believe."

"My patience!" said Christie, dropping her darning now in haste, and springing to the rescue. Baby had intended to put the whole of a spool of silk into his small mouth, and looked much inclined to resent it as Christie dived after the silk. "Why, baby!" in indignation, "I'm astonished at you! You would have choked to death. Besides, that silk is to finish Mrs. Bates' dress, and you have gone and got it all wet. However did it get left on the window, I wonder? Get down, baby, and go and play with Karl's whittlings, that's a dear. There's a pretty

stick you can have too. Is he lame, Karl?"

"What, the stick? No, it isn't lame, but it is rather rough; I'm afraid he will get splinters in his fingers. Here, baby, I'll find you a better one."

Christie stopped to laugh. "You know I mean Wells," she said; "I thought he would have to go on crutches. Does he walk lame?"

"Limps a little, and can't walk far, Nick said; but it wasn't a very bad sprain. Nick said the doctor said that the cold water bandages you put on were just the thing; and that when you got ready to set up for a surgeon, he would take you into partnership."

"Karl!" said Christie, her face aglow with delight, "did they truly think it did any good?"

"Yes, they truly did. Nick said just that. I meant to have told you; but this going to town of father's and mother's put everything else out of my head."

"Karl, did Wells speak to you this morning?"

"No; how should he? I don't know him, and more than likely he doesn't want to know me."

"That is all nonsense!" Christie said, speaking with more earnestness than usual. "He is

just as nice and pleasant as he can be. And I don't believe you gave him a chance to speak to you, or he would have done it. You know what I told you about his saying that you never would speak?"

Karl whittled sturdily. "That is all very well," he said at last. "And you, being a girl, don't understand, of course. There isn't so much difference between the look of you, all dressed up as you were, taking a ride on the cars, and Wells Burton taking a ride in his everyday clothes. Of course he would be nice to you, especially when the first thing he did was to go and get into danger, and let you save his life. But I'm another sort of fellow, I can tell you! My everyday clothes and his don't look any more alike than sunshine and mud. If you had seen us both this morning, you would have known what I mean."

"Clothes are not everything," Christie said, but she said it with a little sigh. She understood what Karl meant, better than she liked to own. A swift glance at him, and a memory of the trim figure in his handsome, well-fitting suit, pointed the truth for her.

"No more they ain't," said Karl, with reck-

less indifference to grammar, "but for all that, a fellow feels better in clothes, I can tell you. See here, baby, shavings were not made to eat. I say, Christie, couldn't we get up a treat for their supper, baked potatoes or something?"

He did not mean for the shavings' supper, as Christie very well understood. She looked up brightly at the suggestion, the little wave of trouble having already gone from her pleasant face. "I guess so," she said. "That would be nice: I mean, *something* would be nice. I don't think baked potatoes are much of a treat. I'll tell you what, Karl, we might have some cream toast. There is a loaf of bread that mother said this morning would make nice toast, and there is a cup of cream we can have, and cream is kind of scarce nowadays, you know. That would be a real treat."

"I'm agreed," said Karl. "I'll toast the bread. I'm a master hand at that. That Sunday-school book of mine is about a fellow who toasted bread for his sister, only he burnt his to a cinder, and that I shall not do. Maybe I would, though, if I had the same reason. It's a splendid story, Christie. They were awful poor, he and his sister; had no father and mother, nor anything but

just themselves. She worked in a factory, and he was a newsboy, but he froze his feet, and could hardly walk for most a month, and that made things harder for them; and they about starved, and froze, too; but one day the overseer of the factory gave the girls in the sister's room a holiday, let them come home at three o'clock, and gave them each a present. The owner of the factory did, you know, in honor of his son's coming of age; he gave them each a whole dollar. And they celebrated, this girl and her brother did. Her name was Jennie, and his was Ben. They decided to have toast and eggs for supper,— wouldn't some eggs go good with our cream toast? Look out there, Christie, that baby is creeping too near the fire!"

"What happened that made him burn the toast?" asked Christie as she set the baby at a respectful distance from the fire, and gave him a string of empty spools to play with. There was hardly anything that Christie liked better than a story. The reason she was not poring over that Sabbath-school book, at this moment, was because she knew that the darning must be done, and that if she did not do it, her mother would have to in the evening; and the reason she did



OUT OF REACH OF THE FIRE.

not coax Karl to read the book aloud, was because she knew that the new-fashioned work-box was to be a surprise for his mother, and a whole afternoon with the mother away was a golden opportunity not to be lost for a trifle. So after all, I am glad to be able to tell you that there were things which Christie Tucker liked better than story books, and one was to do faithfully and cheerfully what she knew she ought to do. But all this did not hinder her from being deeply interested in the story that Karl was telling. He was not fond of telling stories.

"You never can get things as they were in the book," he would say, "and they sound flat."

"Why, something tremendous happened. You see the sister Jennie was grown up — she was most ten years older than Ben — and once there had been a young man who was to be married to her; but he went away to California and she did not hear from him at all. And after two years she knew he was dead, and wore a black dress all the time, only Sundays, then she put on her one white one, for Ben's sake, to make him feel less lonesome, you know. Well, while the third slice of bread was toasting — they were each to have two slices,

because it was a holiday — there came a knock at the door, and Jennie opened it, and there stood a man who took her right in his arms and kissed her, and *kissed* her. And she screamed, and he cried and laughed, and Ben stared, and the toast burned up.”

“Where had he been all the two years?” demanded Christie, the spirit of the coming woman blazing in her eyes. “I wouldn’t have let him kiss me if he had stayed away all that time, and left me alone.”

“Oh, he had been sick, and robbed by a highwayman, and most killed, and I don’t know what all had happened. *He* couldn’t help it. And he was rich; he had found a place in the gold mine that nobody knew about, and it had lots of gold. They were married, he and Jennie, and they sent Ben to school, and he had no end of a good time and all the toast and eggs he wanted.”

“It is only in books that such things happen,” said Christie, turning cynical, though there was a bit of wistfulness in her voice.

“Nobody ever comes knocking at our door with some wonderful news. I wish there would, but I don’t expect it.”

"I wish there would too, and bring me an arithmetic, the kind they use at the school ; then maybe I could catch up with them." And now there was a wistful sound in Karl's voice. What a pity that some of the boys and girls whose cast-off arithmetics are lying useless on upper shelves could not have heard him !

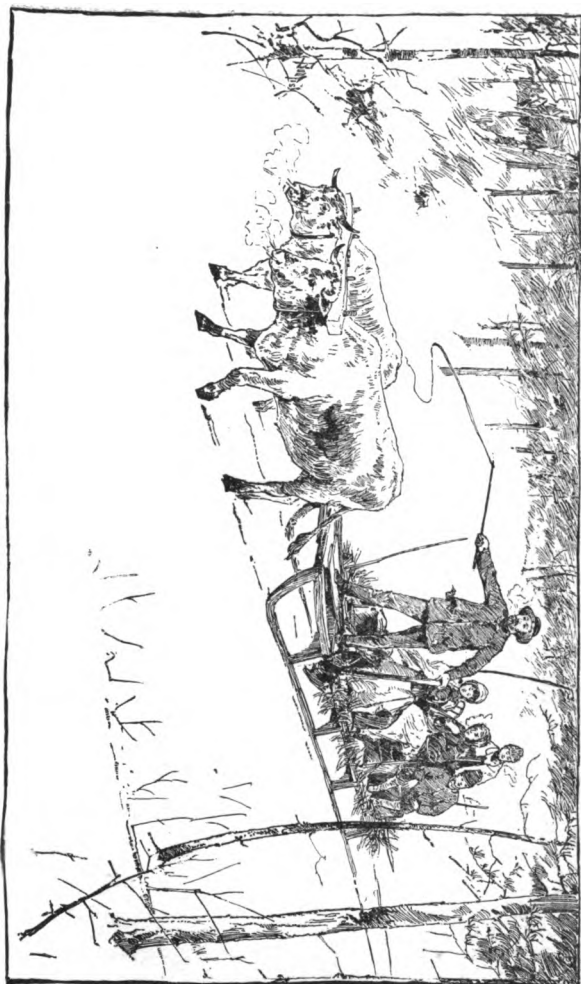
Christie considered the matter in grave silence. She wished very much for an arithmetic, and for several other things, but the winter was a hard one, and she saw no way to secure them. Occasionally she sighed over that reckless expenditure of money which had been made in going to uncle Daniel's. That would have bought an arithmetic. She had offered to give up the journey—she was glad to remember that—but they had all insisted on her going, Karl as stoutly as any of the others ; and even now she could not be sorry that she went.

She did not get to uncle Daniel's, it is true, but she lived a whole story book in that one day, which would answer to read over all winter.

It was a pleasant kitchen in which these two sat and worked. The floor was bright with hard rubbing, and gay with certain braided mats over which both Karl and Christie had worked faith-

fully for many an hour. The soft coal in the little cook stove needed only the poke which Karl occasionally gave it, to break into a glow and a bustle. The little stove shone with a polish that Christie's own hands had given it, and reflected the play of the flames most brilliantly. There was an old-fashioned table standing against the wall; one of the kind whose leaves turned down. By and by it would do duty as a dining table. Now it was covered with a cloth made of pieces of bright wools. "Crazy patchwork," Christie called it, and occasionally when Karl tried to help clear up the room, and could not get the cloth on straight, he took refuge in the fact that it was "crazy." There were three or four wooden chairs, shining with cleanliness, there was a large arm chair, cushioned, for "father," a cunning little high chair, standing close beside it, with the very brightest and softest of cushions in it, that, of course, was baby's. There was a cunning little home-made couch, or "settee," as they called it, fashioned, the frame of it, by Karl, with his skilful jack-knife, and a hammer and nails, upholstered in unique style by Christie herself; and this was the exclusive property of the small lady Nettie. Then there

MOTHER'S SLEIGHRIDES.



was the one extravagance of which this room could boast—a lovely little wicker rocking-chair which Mrs. Tucker declared fitted every crook in her tired back, and for which father and children had carefully saved, I should hardly like to tell you for how many months, lest you might think they were poor, and there are plenty of people poorer than they.

This was about all the furniture that the neat room contained, save baby's box of playthings, and a torn picture book or two, laid carefully away on the mantelpiece. I hardly know what made it look so cheerful, save that there was an air of home about it, and the faces gathered within it were generally bright.

Oh, yes, there was an old-fashioned clock in the corner, which faithfully ticked the hours, and at which Christie looked every now and then.

"I wonder when we ought to begin getting our treat ready?" she said. "There is one bad thing about cream toast; it wants to be eaten as soon as it is ready."

"And there is one bad thing about folks," said Karl; "they never come home when you think they will. Halloo! have they come al-

ready ! That man said ' Whoa, ' right out here."

He shook the shavings from his clothes and hastened to the window.

" They can't have come yet," said practical Christie, for father was to see Mr. Marshall, and he couldn't see him until after four o'clock."

" Christie Tucker, it is the big depot wagon, and it has stopped here, and the man that helps load things, is coming up our walk ! What do you suppose he wants ?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SURPRISE.

WHY," said Christie, "I suppose he wants to know where somebody lives. You go to the door, Karl." For the man was knocking, and Christie caught up the baby just in time to get him out of the whirl of wind that came in at the open door.

"Is this Mr. Jonas Tucker's place?" the gruff voice asked. The man was a new comer, and did not know the country very well, though Karl felt well acquainted with him, having watched him often as he loaded his big white covered wagon—or "prairie-schooner," as the wagons for transportation are called in the "Far West."

"Yes, sir," said Karl, "but he isn't at home. He went to the city right after dinner."

"Is there a Miss Christie Tucker in the family?"

"No, sir; Miss! Why — no — yes, yes, sir, I suppose there is."

"Well, you seem to be mighty uncertain about it; when you get your mind fully made up, I wish you would tell me. Are you sure you live here yourself?"

Astonished as he was, Karl could not help laughing over this.

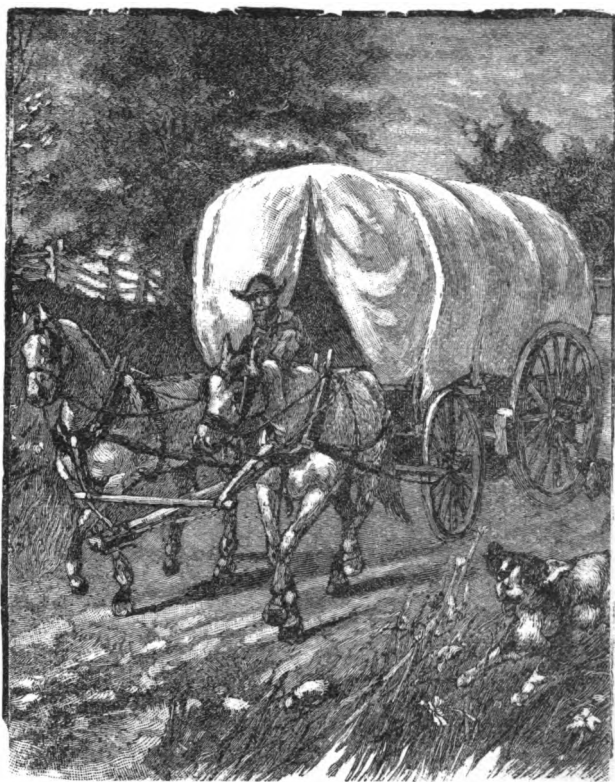
"Yes, sir," he said very decidedly, "I do; and so does Christie; though it seemed so funny to hear her called 'Miss,' that I thought you must mean somebody else. She is a little girl."

Just so. Little or big, I don't know as it makes much difference to me, provided her name is Christie. I've got an express package out here for her as big as the house, most, and as heavy as all creation."

Then did Christie set the baby down hastily in the farthest corner she could find, and come to the door.

"There is some mistake, Karl," she said hurriedly; "nobody would send an express package to me."

"We don't think it can belong to us," explained Karl to the man who was turning to go



"HERE COMES THE BIG DEPOT WAGON!"

down the walk. "We don't know anybody who would send packages to us."

"I haven't got anything to do with that, as I know of. It is marked Miss Christie Tucker, as plain as black paint and a good deal of it can mark it, and sent to this office; and the clerk who has been here ever since there was a place says he don't know of any other Tucker within ten miles of the town, only Jonas, and you say the little girl's name is Christie, so I guess it's all right. Anyway, if the man has made a mistake and sent his bundle to the one he doesn't want to have it, why, that's his lookout, not mine. We'll bring the thing in, and you get away from the door, for it will about fill up your kitchen."

Away he tramped, whistling gayly as he went, and Christie and Karl looked at each other in great perplexity.

"It is all wrong," murmured Christie. "They will just have to come to-morrow and take it away, and maybe it will cost father something; mother will say that we ought not to have let them bring it in. O, Karl! they always have to pay for express packages. They mark them C. O. D. Father was telling me about that,

only yesterday, when I helped him hold that beam, you know."

"We sha'n't pay any C. O. D., or any other kind of fish," declared Karl sturdily, rising to assert his manhood. "If he leaves a thing here that we say doesn't belong to us, he will get no money for it from us, that's sure."

"That's so," said Christie, relieved and admiring. "We can't tell him not to leave it, I suppose, but we can tell him that we are not going to pay for it. In fact, we couldn't; because we haven't any money!"

By this time the great roll, whatever it was, riding on the shoulders of two stout men, had reached the door, and was thumped down on the clean kitchen floor.

"My patience!" said Christie. The thing was so large that she could not help exclaiming over it.

"Look here," said Karl, still intent on business, "we don't at all think that that thing belongs to us, and we can't pay you a cent for leaving it here."

"All right," the good-natured man said, a broad smile on his face. "There isn't a cent to pay, and if I find any other Christie Tucker

who wants the thing worse than you do, I'll come and take it away again for nothing at all."

And he went puffing away out of the little house, and down the walk, a smile all over his great broad face.

When he was gone, the two young people stood and looked, first at the roll, and then at each other. Of course the baby crawled out of his corner, and hovered around the great bundle, and tried to push it with his little hands, and tried to bite it, and tried to lift it, and finally sat down on it in triumph, believing that he had found out its use.

"What in the world can it be?" Karl asked, at last.

"And whose can it be?" added Christie, looking at the great roll with longing eyes.

"Why, it's plain enough that it is yours. Anyhow, that is your name, Christie Tucker, as large as life, and we *know* there isn't another Christie Tucker anywhere around. The question is, where did it come from, and what is it for?"

"Uncle Daniel never would" — said Christie slowly, thinking aloud, and leaving her sentence unfinished.

"No," said Karl with emphasis, understanding her as well as though she had finished it, "he never would in this world. Christie Tucker, I believe in my heart it is a carpet. It is done up, for all the world, like the rolls that Nick takes up to the Burton's, and other places, and he says they are carpets straight from the stores. They sew them all up in that straw kind of stuff, so they won't get dirty on the journey."

"Then of course it isn't ours, for we haven't bought any carpet at the stores, that is certain."

"No," Karl said slowly, and argumentatively; "but then, see here, Christie, neither have we bought anything else, and this is something, so I don't see as that proves anything. I'd like to see the inside of it, wouldn't you? Shall we rip it open?"

"Oh, no! We mustn't; mother wouldn't think it was right. It will have to go back, of course; they have sent it to the wrong town, maybe, and father would have no end of trouble in getting it sewed up again. We must just push it into the corner and let it alone; and Karl, it is time we were getting our treat ready, or planning for it, at least. Look! it has stopped

snowing, and I believe the sun is going to set clear. They will have a nice ride home."

"I can't imagine what the thing is," said Karl. He did not mean the sun, nor yet the ride home. Eyes and thoughts were still on the great roll. He was not in the mood to give it up so quietly.

"I'll tell you what, Christie, I believe we ought to open it. This stuff is all damp on the outside, and it may be something that the damp will hurt. We ought to take care of it whosever it is."

"It won't hurt before mother and father come," Christie said, with the quiet tone in her voice, which Karl knew meant, "It has my name on it, and therefore I have the right to decide, and I decide that it is not to be touched." At the same time, she lifted the baby from it in haste, and examined carefully the little flannel dress, to see if it felt damp. A little woman was Christie.

Karl recognized the power in the quiet voice, and began gravely to roll the bundle into the corner.

It took every bit of strength there was in his stout young body; and before he had made

much progress, an exclamation from Christie stopped him.

"Karl, there comes another wagon! It has stopped before the gate, and a man is coming up to the door; and it is loaded with all sorts of stuff!"

You see how these two people muddled the English language when they were excited. Of course Christie did not mean the door was loaded, but the wagon. Karl left his roll, and came to attend to this new and startling development.

"That is the depot freight wagon," he chuckled, "and that is Jim Pierce driving. I know him, anyhow, and he knows me."

"Halloo!" said Jim Pierce, as the door swung back almost before he had a chance to knock. "Here you are, eh? Well, is there a Christie Tucker tucked in here anywhere, that's the question. Miss Christie Tucker; can you find her?"

"Yes," said Karl, laughing merrily; this whole affair was growing very funny to him. "I've got her here safe; what do you want of her?"

"Why, I'm getting her ready to set up house-keeping. There's a bedstead, and bureau, and

chairs, and a sofy, and don't know what all, out in my wagon ; as cunning a little set-out as ever you see, all belonging to Miss Christie Tucker. You aren't getting ready for a wedding nor nothing, are you, Karl?"

Whereupon Karl laughed again, loud and long. But Christie did not laugh ; her face was pale. At once her thoughts reverted to the nice old gentleman whose acquaintance she had made that day on the cars, remembering all



THE NICE OLD GENTLEMAN.

his kind words and nice suggestions. How earnest he was to do the Master's work ! A nice old gentleman indeed.

But why ? she wondered. What did all this strange proceedings mean ? Just like a story in a book !

"We are having a dream, we guess, or writing a book, or else there's witches around," explained Karl. "Christie said things never happened except in books, but I guess she will

change her mind after to-day. Honestly, Jim, we don't know a thing about it, and father and mother are not at home, and we know they haven't bought any furniture, just as well as we know anything."

"Well," said Jim, "you know a good deal, I'll admit; but then I know how to read writing when I see it, especially when it is print; and these things are all marked Miss Christie Tucker as plain as the nose on your face; and when I see them, I says to Bill, says I, 'There ain't no Christie Tucker around here except that little thing up to Jonas Tucker's?' 'No more there ain't,' says Bill, 'nor any other Tucker folks but them, this side of the city; you may as well pile 'em in and get them over there out of the way.' So here I am, and my team must be unloaded, you see; so if you will ask Miss Christie where she will have the things put, we'll be stepping about."

Then Christie sat the baby down very decidedly and came to the door.

"It is all a mistake, sir," she said earnestly; "it means some other Christie Tucker, you may be sure. I'm only a little girl, and there is nobody to send me things. If you could wait a

little bit until father comes, he could tell you there was a mistake, and that would save your unloading the things, and loading them up again, for I know they will have to go away."

Jim Pierce smiled admiringly on the little woman.

"Me and father come out to this country sixteen year ago last October," he said, hitching at one suspender to bring it into place, "and we know every foot of land within thirty miles of here, and the name of every man, woman and child in this part of the country, and there ain't no Christie Tucker except yourself, and I reckon if the things ain't fur you, they don't belong to nobody; and I reckon I better unload, for that is a deceitful kind of a sunset, and I shouldn't wonder if we had a squally evening. Bill and I will jest set the things inside out of the storm, and to-morrow we can tote 'em back, if you find any place where they fit better. There ain't nothing to pay. Boss, he come to the door, jest as I drove out, and says he, 'Those goods are paid for, delivered at the door;' so delivered at the door it is. Pitch in, Bill, no time to waste."

And they "pitched in!" Christie gathered

up the baby and stood at the window in silent bewildered dismay, while Karl opened the door of the neat, bare little parlor and let the muffled up freight take possession. What to do, the little woman did not know. She had done all she could; there seemed nothing now but to wait.

"Father and mother haven't been away before in a year," she told the baby, "and I hope they won't go again for another year. Who would have thought of so many things happening in this little while! We've lived here years and years, and nothing has happened!"

"Ah, da! da!" said baby, and dived after a flake of snow that just then blew past the window. Baby did not agree with Christie; he believed this to be a wonderful world. Had it not turned white all in a minute while he was looking at it? What was a wagon or two stopping at the gate, compared with that?

"Whew!" said Karl, coming presently from the next room, bringing a gust of cold air with him. "They're all in, Christie, and it fills the room pack full. I never saw the beat in my life! If it was Christmas now, and we believed in the Santa Claus that comes down the chimney.

Or if we had a rich uncle who had been dead twenty years, to come to life like that one did in the story. It's great fun, anyhow ; if every one of them has to be toted back to the depot to-morrow I'm kind of glad they've come. It seems like business, to have teams stopping, and be directing where to put things. I wish they *were* ours, Christie, every one of them. You can't see what a thing is, they are so muffled up, but you can guess at some of them. I declare, it is a lark !”

“I'm real sorry to have them come,” Christie said gravely. “It will just make trouble for father ; and then it is lonesome to have them all go away again and not belong at all, as we know they don't.”

“That is true,” Karl said, his face growing sober, “but then, Christie, we couldn't help it. We did the only thing there was to do ; so why not have all the fun there is to be got out of it?”

“We will,” said Christie, smiling. “We will make believe they are ours, and we have earned them, and are going to surprise father and mother with them. There is a rocking chair among them that looks as though it might be the mate to mother's, only a prettier shape.”

Karl sat down on the great roll of burlap, his face grave and his eyes large with the thought that had suddenly taken possession of him.

"Christie," he said, and his voice was so full of earnestness that she turned and looked at him curiously. There were times when she did not more than half understand this stout little brother of hers, "Christie, let's truly do it; no making believe about it. I don't mean now, of course, but let's you and I earn the beautiful things to put in their room; twice as nice as any of these things are; and carpets as soft and bright as they have up at Burtons'; and lamps, or — no, gas, five or six burners in every room, and silk curtains, or velvet, at the window, and — well, everything that anybody else has. I say, let's you and I earn them for father and mother. Folks do it; poor boys do it, I've read about them often! And it isn't all story either. Look at uncle Daniel; he was a poor boy, poorer than we are, a good deal, and see how he lives! We can do it, Christie, will you?"

"Yes;" said Christie bravely, her eyes twinkling with a merry light. "I'll do my very best

at it, and if we like these things that have to be sent back, we'll look at them carefully, and buy ours just like them. In the meantime, Karl, while we are waiting for the time to come, shall we make them some cream toast for their supper?"

Karl laughed at this, and arose and shook himself, like one who had been dreaming and wanted to get thoroughly awake.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose cream toast will have to do for to-night; and it is high time it was getting ready. I'll go to the cellar. Only, Christie, I'm going to do the other thing too; remember that." And he went out into the little back kitchen and lighted a lamp and went whistling to the cellar.

Preparations for supper began now in earnest. The short twilight was fading, and night was setting in steadily. The travellers would soon be here. Karl and Christie agreed that the mysterious bundle should be coaxed into the front room with the other mysteries, and not a word said about them until the cream toast and eggs were eaten and enjoyed. "Because if they once get to talking, and looking, and wondering, they won't get to eating supper until the toast and

eggs are spoiled; and they will be so hungry and tired. Mother will need her cup of tea to rest her." So said the young housekeeper.

"Yes; and there is no need of hurrying to tell them, for the teams have all gone back, and there can't be anything done about it until morning." So said the man of business.

Do you know anything about how bright and restful that neat kitchen looked to the cold and hungry people who presently came into its light and warmth?

The fire was glowing brightly, the tea-kettle sang its gayest tune, the table was neatly laid, stewed pears and a plate of cookies occupied places of honor, and the most delightful odor of toast, mingled with the fragrant tea; and the bowl of eggs stood waiting to be dropped at just the right moment into the boiling water.

"This is nice," Mother Tucker said, leaning back in her little rocker, and cuddling the delighted baby.

"There is nothing like it in town, Christie; we passed some nice-looking homes, and the curtains were up, and everything looked pretty inside, but father said, 'We don't want to stop

there, do we? They haven't got our boy and girls.' ”

Then did Christie, with a happy little laugh, pop in her eggs, and set the baby's chair to the table, and tie Nettie's bib about her, for she heard a stamping in the outer kitchen, and she knew the two men had disposed of the horses, and were ready for supper.

All through the pleasant supper time, she and Karl had the hardest work to keep from going off into bubbles of laughter, and all the time their hearts sang the story: “What in the world will they say when we show them the front room ! ”

At last Father Tucker said there was no use, he couldn't eat that last bit of toast, nice as it was, and Karl telegraphed to Christie, “Now begin.”

And just then Mother Tucker said :

“Now, my girl, if your supper is eaten, we have a surprise for you.”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE LETTER SAID.

AND then to the astonished eyes of Christie, there was handed forth a letter.

“Miss Christie Tucker.”

So read the envelope, and the writing was in itself a source of pleasure, it was so beautiful. Christie had never seen her name very well written before. She had never seen it written at all on an envelope. Her first letter! You girls who are used to receiving letters every week from some dear friend, cannot have the least idea how she felt.

But the letter, surprising though it was, did not entirely fill Karl's mind. In fact it did not compare with those mysterious rolls and bundles which covered all the space in the front room.

He looked over Christie's shoulder at the letter, but he whispered to her, “Let's tell them our surprise; it is bigger than theirs.”

One little thing about Karl I would like you to notice. Why did he not burst forth with the importance of his secret, without waiting for Christie? You have heard many a boy do it. Indeed, I wouldn't say this for the world to any but you, but have you really never done it yourself? This was another way in which Karl's honest, unselfish nature showed itself; honest, because he remembered that all those mysterious packages had Christie Tucker's name printed on them, and this was therefore her secret which he had no right to tell; unselfish, because he felt in his heart that Christie would like to tell about it herself, and he would not spoil her chance. You have never told news that did not belong to you, except when you did it without thinking. Is that what you say? Oh, I presume not, but then, my boy, you must remember that we can be selfish and dishonest through thoughtlessness. That is a mean door, which lets all sorts of meannesses in through it, when once it is left open.

There are two sides to this question. In point of fact, Christie was overwhelmed with curiosity about her letter, and would have liked to read it, and talk it over then and there, but

Karl's heart was set on the other story, and the letter would keep.

"Yes," she said aloud, "such a surprise as we



THE FIRST LETTER.

have for you ! I don't know what you will think of us, or of all the things that have happened. We have had company, lots of it ; haven't we, Karl ?"

"I should think we had!" burst forth Karl; "fact is, the front room is full of company this minute!"

And at the look on his mother's face Karl broke down in a gust of laughter.

"Company!" she repeated, some dismay as well as surprise in her voice. "Why, children, what do you mean? Your uncle Daniel's folks can't have come" —

"No, ma'am," interrupted Karl, "there's no uncle Daniel's folks about it; they can't look a bit like him. Tell about it, Christie."

"Why, first," said Christie, "the express wagon came, and Karl went to the door, and they asked for *me*, mother, only think of it! and Karl said — O father, what *do* you think he told the man! You tell, Karl."

And then Christie stopped to laugh, and Karl took up the remarkable story. What with laughter, and interrupting questions, and appeals to each other to tell that part, it really took a good deal of time to tell it, and it was all so funny, that Nettie and the baby shouted with laughter, without having the least idea what they were laughing about; and Mother Tucker looked from one to another and said:

"Well, I declare! I believe you children are all getting crazy."

At last they went, lamp in hand, to the front room, Karl leading the way, and father bringing up the rear with the baby in his arms. Once there, they stopped laughing, and looked around them with bewildered faces.

"Upon my word!" said Father Tucker, "I can't make this out. I didn't half notice what you children were saying. Do you see through it all, mother?"

"No more than if I were blind," said Mother Tucker with emphasis, sitting plump down on the great roll done up in burlap, and clasping her hands on her knees. "I can't make beginning nor end to it. Where could they all come from, anyway? Of course it is a mistake, somehow, but where *is* the Christie Tucker to whom they all belong, and where has she kept herself, that nobody knows or has heard of her.

"Christie's here, mamma," piped Nettie, "she's wight behind the door, Christie is;" and she tried to drag her sister into the light to relieve her mother's mind. Then they all shouted with laughter again, baby and all.

"We act like a set of lunatics," Father Tucker

said at last, stooping to lift Nettie to his other shoulder, "and we must get out of this room as fast as we can; the baby is beginning to sneeze."

This sentence brought Mother Tucker to her feet in an instant. She untied her apron and muffled it about the baby's shoulder, then led the way to the warm kitchen.

"Christie," said Karl, as he closed the door after the last one had filed in, "what about your letter?"

"Sure enough, the letter!" In the excitement of the moment, even her first letter had been slipped into her pocket and forgotten. She dived after it, trying nervously to break the seal, just as Karl said,

"Perhaps the things and the letter belong together, somehow."

"How could they?" Christie asked skeptically; but the boy's thoughts had already gone off on another line.

"They don't do it that way, Christie; they rip open the end, and leave the sealed part all tight; don't they, father? I've seen them open lots of letters at the depot. Here, take my knife; that will do it in a jiffy."

So the letter was opened, and properly too,

and Christie sat down on Nettie's little settee to read it.

MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND :

I am afraid you have forgotten me, but your pleasant face is before me now very plainly. I don't easily forget my relatives. Perhaps you will be surprised at receiving a letter from me, yet I promised myself that day when I made your acquaintance, that I would do myself the pleasure of writing to you before long. I have been longer about it than I meant ; certain plans I had did not move as fast as I wanted them to. For one thing, I suppose I must have been very particular about a carpet" —

Here came interruptions.

"What's that?" asked Father Tucker. "A carpet!" repeated Mother Tucker, as though she could not believe her own ears. "There!" said Karl, in triumph, "what did I tell you, Christie Tucker!" then forgetting that he was helping to make the delay, he exclaimed, "do read on!" and at the first opportunity, Christie read on.

"You see I wanted just the sort of one you seemed to have in mind when you described it

to me: 'ferns all over it, and red berries like what mother used to gather in the woods in the East.' Wasn't that the description?"

"That letter must be from a crazy man. What in the world is he talking about?" This was Mother Tucker's interruption, but Christie read on.

"I couldn't find the ferns, but the little red berries are there, and the leaves are very like some that I gathered in the woods in old Massachusetts in my boyhood, and I shouldn't wonder if your mother would recognize them. I was foolish enough not to ask the size of the parlor, so I could not have the carpet made; indeed, now I think of it, it does not seem altogether probable that you carried the size of the parlor around in your pocket, or even in that nice satchel; though as there seemed to come out of it everything that was needed for the comfort of us all, that Christmas day, I am not sure but I might have found what I wanted, if I had thought in time. We lose a great many things in this world by not thinking in time.

"Well, little woman, I will tell you what I hope: that there is enough of the carpet, not only for the parlor, but for that nice little room

of your own; and I picked out a little bedstead and a little bureau and a little washstand with 'flowers growing all over them,' like the ones you didn't get to the city to see, and I matched the carpet as well as I could; so I really hope there will be enough for the room.

"There is one article of furniture about which I must tell you. It happens that that Governor with whom you had such a pleasant talk, is a particular friend of mine, and always stops in to see me when he comes to the city.

"One day he was in when I had a great many rolls of carpeting around, and was picking out the one I wanted, and I told him about my little relative, and our ride together, and the bandaged ankle, and the lost baby — or rather the lost mother — and Sarah Ann and the dinner; the truth is, it made quite a long story, and as the Governor remembered you distinctly, he seemed to enjoy it; in fact, he was so sorry for that baby, that he wiped the tears from his eyes several times, and when I had finished, he said: 'See here, I would like to know if she isn't a relative of mine as well as yours? I belong to the same family; what is to hinder my sending her a Christmas present?' So we went

together to the warerooms, and he selected those two large easy chairs, which match the colors of the carpet, because he said he could see your father and mother sitting in them, and you looking on, much better pleased than though they just fitted your size. So the two chairs are from the Governor.

“Now, my dear little friend, you must not let your wise and unselfish heart go to fearing that a great deal of money has been spent on these things, or that they are wonderful in any way. The truth is, that I and my sons keep a large carpet and furniture warehouse in this city, and though the carpet is clean and bright, and in good order, and a favorite with me, it is one that the fashionable ladies, who come to select carpets, call ‘old style,’ and it has been in our carpet rooms a good while, and would be there much longer unless we should put it down below its value; for you see, people who are not very fashionable when they go to buy a new carpet, know just what the fashions are, and will not take anything else, unless they can get it at so low a price that we might almost as well have the pleasure of giving it away. About the same story can be told of the furniture. The

pieces all harmonize, but do not 'match.' I wonder if you are too young a woman to understand what I mean? I know this, you are not too young to get the dictionary and study out the meaning, and that I am sure you will do. Meantime, that good mother and father of yours will understand all about it, and will be quite willing to let the old gentleman enjoy himself and give you these few things for a Christmas reminder, since they are neither costly nor very important.

"What a long letter the old man is writing! And yet I want to make it just a little longer. I want to remind you, that since you and I are related, it follows that all our possessions, carpets, furniture, everything, belong to our Elder Brother, and are to be used to help along his work. All pretty things, especially, should be used to help gather his children into his beautiful home, so, dear little sister, I hope as soon as ever the last tack is driven in the carpet, you will have planned a way to make its leaves and berries help in serving Him.

"There are ever so many ways in which even a carpet, and a bureau, and an easy chair, can be made his servants, if those who have them

in charge will take the trouble to study out the ways ; this I feel sure you will do, and therefore send them, after all, in the name of our Elder Brother, as his gift, to be held in trust until He comes.

"Good-by, little sister. It may be that I shall never see you again down here ; if I don't and I get home first, as in view of my seventy-seven years it seems likely that I shall, I will try to be on the lookout for you, and we will talk things over with Him.

"Your old friend and brother,

"THOMAS L. FLETCHER."

"For pity's sake!" said Mrs. Tucker, her face a curious mixture of bewilderment and pleasure.

"Well, well, well!" said Father Tucker, "that beats all I ever heard of in my life. I know that name too; they have one of the biggest houses in the city, and they get their goods right from New York. Why, Christie, what does it all mean?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Tucker, "that is what I should like to know. What in the world did you tell him, child? About your wanting a

carpet, and about my having carpets with ferns on them, and about furniture and all that? What queer talk to an old gentleman, and a stranger. How came you to?"

"I didn't mean to do anything wrong, mother."



FATHER TUCKER AND NETTIE.

Christie's chin was quivering, and she could hardly control her voice to speak; the fatigues of the day, and the excitements of the evening, were being almost too much for her, and at this word of her mother's, which seemed to have a note of reproof in it, she could hardly keep back the tears. "It all seemed real natural;

we were there all day, you know, and we had nothing to do, and we couldn't help getting pretty well acquainted, and he asked me what I expected to see at uncle Daniel's, what I had thought a good deal about and planned for, you know, and I couldn't tell him anything but the truth, though I didn't say much about a carpet, or furniture, only that I would like to see some, like what uncle David had; I said the most about a piano, but, mother, I did not dream of such a thing as his ever sending me anything; how could I?"

And here Christie quite broke down, and wiped two tears out of her eyes.

Father Tucker never liked to see tears, and always made all the haste he could to dry them.

"It is my opinion, mother, from the tone of that letter, that our little girl didn't say anything to be ashamed of. The old gentleman seems to have quite as good an opinion of her as though she had not talked at all. I don't believe there is anything to worry about."

"Why, of course not," said Mrs. Tucker promptly. She liked tears as little as anybody, especially in her eldest daughter's eyes. "Who ever thought of blaming Christie? I would as

soon think of myself saying anything improper as of that child! I only felt kind of curious to know how it all came about. It is real wonderful, anyhow. But now I'll tell you just what will be a hard and a right thing to do; things that are right are often hard; Christie looks all tuckered out, and we ought just to wash these dishes, and straighten up the room, and get to bed, and not go near the front room until to-morrow morning."

"O mother!" said Karl. It seemed to him that he should fly up the chimney if he couldn't have a glimpse of some of those wonders in the front room before morning.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tucker firmly, "they will every one of them keep, and by daylight, when things are cleared up and comfortable, they will look as pretty again as they will to-night, and the children will enjoy it too; here is Nettie dropped asleep while that letter was being read. Christie, my girl, what do you say? Isn't it the thing to do?"

"Yes'm," said Christie rising, her face cleared. She had been astonished at and ashamed of her tears; she rarely cried, unless she had something to cry for, and knew little about overwrought

nerves. "I'll clear away, mother, and you can rest and get Nettie and the baby ready for bed. Come on, Karl, and carry these things out for me."

So brisk work commenced again in the little kitchen. The evening had sped away while they were looking and wondering and listening, and it was even now later than the Tucker children were apt to be awake. The brother and sister talked as they worked, even allowing themselves to guess as to what color the carpet might be, and what that sort of three-cornered thing was, that would neither stand up nor lie down.

It was not until the kitchen was in perfect order, and the cakes were set for morning, and Karl had already gone to his room, and Christie, with her shoes in her hand, was ready to slip into the little bedroom beside Nettie, that she stopped before her mother and said :

"Mother, there is one thing I want to ask about to-night. How can I ever do as the lettersays about using the things? What good can I do with a pretty carpet or bedstead?"

The mother's face was thoughtful. She had been asking herself much the same question.

"I don't know, child," she said at last, slowly, a little sadly, "I never heard such talk as that before in my life. It seems kind of queer, and yet I liked it. I don't know much about such things, not near as much as I wish I did. There must be ways of doing that we can find out. We'll ask Mr. Keith, maybe, or we'll study something up. It is a wonderful thing to happen to you, my girl. I guess there is a good deal in it to be proud of, if the real truth was known; but we mustn't be proud. We'll try to find out. You go to bed now, and mother will come in pretty soon and tuck you up."

So Christie went to her room, and knelt down, only a few minutes, for the room was cold—just long enough to ask God to forgive her for all the sins of the day, and take care of her and all her dear ones through the night, and to thank him for the wonderful thing that had happened to her, and to ask him to show her how to use the carpets and the furniture as the letter said. Then she went to bed, and her mother came and tucked her up and kissed her, and neither mother nor daughter knew that the furniture had already begun to do work for Jesus, by awakening a desire for work.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN ORDER AT LAST.

IT was a wonder that the Tucker family had any breakfast the next morning! That great, bare, cold, front room, had such charms for them as were never known before.

Yet they did not open a bundle nor even pull away some of the wrappings to catch a glimpse of the mysterious inside. They contented themselves with hovering on the outside of things, and saying to one another that they must wait until breakfast was over. But the younger members of the family took many trips from the kitchen to the front room to see if that bundle by the door was probably a chair or what.

"It is too big for a chair," would Christie say, "and yet it is too low for a table, or a bureau, and besides, it feels soft and cushiony; I can't think what it is."

Then Karl, in his greater knowledge of the world, would explain:

"It is a chair, you'll see if it isn't, and that one over by the south window is just like it — a great cushioned chair. They cushion them all over, arms, and sides, and back, and everywhere, so you can't see the wood at all, and would think it was made of feathers or something. I saw one at the depot. It was all done up in this yellow-brown stuff, but yet you could sit down in it, and Nick said it was a library chair that the Burtons wanted down for their parlor; he said it was all cushioned with green stuff that looked like velvet and had flowers on it."

The only answer that Christie made to this was a long-drawn sigh; it expressed her silent wonder over the lovely things that there were in the world; and her desire to see inside this great cushiony bundle was stronger than ever; but all she said was: "Oh, dear! the coffee is boiling over, I smell it!" Then she ran.

The next visit to the front room grew out of a discussion as to whether the bedstead was narrow enough to go in that little niche between the chimney and the door, in Christie's room.

Karl believed that it was, while Christie thought not; of course the only way was to go and measure it. Karl was right, and Christie in admiration asked him how he knew.



"WE WALKED THROUGH THE WOODS TOGETHER."

"Why, I measured it by my eye," he said. "Men do that way, you know; I am practising it. I measure most everything I see in my mind, you know, and try to calculate whether it will go in some place that I think of, and most always I guess it right. This is an exact fit."

Mother Tucker came in search of them to tell

Karl that she needed another pail of water, and she sat down on the roll of carpeting, and helped them guess what colors were in it, and which way of the room it ought to run, until the kitchen stove took things into its own hands again, and a smell of burning potatoes was wafted in at the open door. Then they all ran.

Breakfast was over at last. Christie was surprised to discover that she was not hungry at all, and she raised a hearty laugh by asking her father if he would have a piece of carpet, when she meant johnny-cake.

"Now bustle around," said Mother Tucker, "and get the dishes washed up, as fast as you are a mind to, and then we will all go in and see things. Father can get in from the barn by that time, and Karl can finish his chores and be all ready to help us. Won't that be the best way, my girl?"

And Christie, piling the cups and saucers together in haste, smothered a sigh of impatience and said "she guessed" it would. There was no family worship in the Tucker household. Away back in Mrs. Tucker's Eastern home, the family used to gather every morning for the father to read in the Bible and pray. Mrs.

Tucker often thought of it, and felt sorry to see her children growing up without any such memories. But Mr. Tucker was not a Christian, and she had never learned to pray before him, nor before her children. So the children who had never been away from home a night in their lives, did not so much as know of this custom which belongs to Christian families.

So on this morning, each one sped at once to his or her work, and made all possible haste. And at last they met in the front room, and the business of untying knots, and ripping basting stitches, and unrolling burlaps, and wrapping papers, went on briskly amid constant exclamations of surprise and delight. A bedstead with real flowers growing on it! At least that was the way they looked to Christie. A soft greenish ground, and pink fuchsias bobbing their heads up and down on it! A bureau to match, with a lovely glass set in an oval frame to fit on it. A charming bureau, washstand, with drawers and locks; all with these wonderful flowers growing on the polished wood. Then there were the chairs to match the other pieces, and the cunning little stand to match them all. There was a centre-table for the parlor, and a

sofa, or rather couch — if they had known the proper name for it — which had the most lovely covering that Christie had ever even imagined. She stood before it in wondering silent delight, but Mrs. Tucker said: "There, Christie, now you can see brussels carpeting. That is real brussels. Don't you see the flowers all over it, just as I told you? That is the way your aunt Mary's carpet used to look in Boston."

But by this time Karl was giving a peculiar little clucking noise with his tongue and his cheeks, which Christie knew meant wonder and delight. She turned quickly, just as he said, "Chris, look here!"

He had thrown aside the wrappings of the cushiony bundle, and behold a great arm-chair, the like of which none of them had ever seen before, upholstered until it was, Mr. Tucker declared, as good as any old-fashioned feather bed he ever saw, and covered with soft green cloth that actually had flowers stamped on it! It must certainly be much like the one at Burtons' that Nick had described, but think of it standing in their front room!

"Mother," said Christie, her face aglow, her voice in a tremble of excitement, "sit down in

it; oh, mother, do. I want to see how you look."

"For pity's sake!" said Mrs. Tucker, which was what she always said when she did not know how to express her feelings. "Why, it is large enough for the whole family to sit in at once. Dear me! It must be stuffed with feathers! I never saw anything softer, and it just fits into your back. I could sleep here as well as not. Come up here, Baby, there is room for you."

So the baby climbed gleefully into the great, soft corner, and Nettie climbed to the other side, and behold there was room for both! But Karl had dashed at the other "cushiony bundle," and in a very few minutes he wheeled it forward and said, "Father, take a seat."

And Christie curled in a little heap at her mother's feet, and hid her head in her mother's lap, and Karl leaned on the arm of his father's chair, and Mr. Tucker, as he took a seat beside the mother, and looked around on his family, said with a curious quiver in his voice: "I reckon these are the chairs that the Governor sent to our little girl, eh, mother?"

I'm sure it was not any wonder that Christie cried. Though when Karl asked her presently

what in the world she was crying about, she looked up and laughed, and said she was sure she didn't know.

"Look here," said Mother Tucker briskly, trying to rise from her couch, "let's drag the carpet into the other room; this room is too full to get a good view of it, and it is chilly here, besides. I'll tell you what it is, Jonas, now that the front room is going to get furnished for us in the most unheard-of way, we must just get that stove and set it up here, and have a fire now and then, and come in and look at the things, now won't we?"

And the father, as he stooped to take hold of an end of the great roll of carpeting and help Karl drag it to the kitchen, answered that he guessed they would try for it. Ever since the Tuckers had built their little home, they had talked and planned together about furnishing the front room. Each spring the mother had cheerily said that by fall they must try to manage it; in the summer they could get along without the front room very well, because they spent so much time out of doors, and every fall she had cheerily said that the crops had not been quite so good this summer as they had hoped,

and they must try to get along without furnishing the front room until spring. The winters were so cold it was more comfortable in the kitchen, anyway, and next spring they would try for it. So the springs and autumns had come and gone, and left the front room floor bare, and three chairs for the only furniture. The children had not lost faith in their father and mother, for they knew that the resolve was as strong as ever to furnish the front room as soon as they could; but they had begun to understand that with the best of intentions, the furnishing might still be a great way off, and here it had come in the night! "Dropped down in the snow storm," said Karl, "or might as well, for all that we knew about."

Oh, that carpet! How shall I describe to you what it said to the beauty-loving little girl as her father and Karl spread the glowing thing on the floor and matched the breadths and then stood back in silent enjoyment. Christie looked and laughed, and said:

"Oh, mother, only see the red berries! Doesn't it seem as though we could pick them? Oh, look at baby, she is going to try!"

Sure enough, the baby after gazing in silence

for a minute, scrambled down in haste, a business-like look on his face, stepped into the very centre of the glowing carpet, seated himself and dived after a handful of leaves and berries, then looked at his empty hand in grave surprise. Everybody laughed, but there was more than laughter in Mrs. Tucker's voice as she said: "It does remind me of the woods, Jonas — of that piece just behind grandfather's further barn where we walked one afternoon, and picked checkerberries for grandma, and gathered leaves to press for mother. Don't you remember?"

"And promised each other to walk through the wood together, always, after that," said Father Tucker, and there was an unusual sound in his voice too. "Yes, I remember it."

"And did you always walk together?" asked Nettie, who thought it sounded like a story of which she wanted to hear the end.

Then they laughed — that father and mother — until the tears started in their eyes, but the father answered Nettie: "Yes, we did, right straight through the woods, some of them thick, and dark, but after all we most always found leaves and berries."

"*Always*," said the mother. And the older

children dimly understood, but Nettie looked from one to another with a wondering little sigh, and said, "I wish you'd take me wiv you."

"Why, we did!" said both father and mother, and then they went off again into shouts of laughter; and even Karl and Christie were a little puzzled to know what it was all about.

Altogether the Tuckers never had such a day.

To be sure before its close the mother said that it was very fortunate that such days were rare; she did not know what would become of them if it were otherwise.

Strange things happened in the kitchen. Matters that were not used to taking care of themselves ran wild, and did as they pleased. The bread-sponge pleased to get light before anybody thought of such a thing, and ran over the pan, making a sticky mess of the bread blankets, and then finding itself still unattended to, it sulked and soured and had to be coaxed and patted and sweetened with soda, and tasted at last, Christie said, more like "Sarah Ann's" bread than any that she had ever eaten in her mother's house before. This was only one of the many things that happened which should

not have been. The baby was busy. Who ever knew an extra day in a family with a baby, that he didn't do a hundred unexpected and distracting things? This baby tipped over a pail of water on himself, and had to be dressed "to his skin," the mother said, whatever that strange-sounding sentence means, but this did not compare with the last thing he tipped over, which was a bowl of molasses, and in that he dabbled, curly head and all, until when discovered he was a sight to behold. Besides, he bumped his head twice, and got a sliver in his finger. Altogether, I think the most of the members of the Tucker family breathed a sigh of relief when the day was done, and they felt that by the next morning they would probably awaken to take the world more naturally.

From that time for a week, much work was done. It was not the busy season on the little farm, so the mother gave herself steadily to the unusual work of putting the front room in order. The carpet was matched and cut and sewed. Everybody helped. The father, with Karl's help, matched and cut it. Karl, with a large needle, whipped the ends. Christie and her mother sewed on the heavy seams.



MOTHER TUCKER.

Nettie threaded needles, and the baby believed himself to be assisting, when he took his small hand and gave the carpet a few earnest slaps. Nobody could understand just what that meant, until Karl suddenly rolling over on the floor, declared amid bursts of laughter that he believed that he was whipping it! After the sewing, came the tacking. What a thing it was, to be sure, to get that heavy brussels carpet laid smoothly and tacked firmly. Mr. Tucker, winter day though it was, mopped his hot forehead again and again with his handkerchief and declared that he would not have dreamed of its being such a job, and the people who ought to get the best wages going were the carpet men. But at last it was down, and beautifully down too, trust Jonas Tucker for doing well whatever he undertook.

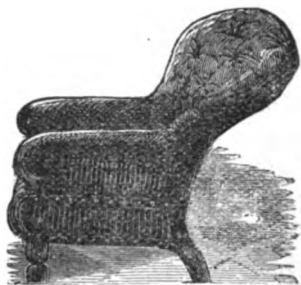
"The last tack is in!" he called to the mother and Christie, one afternoon. "Now come and look at it; it was a job, I tell you, and I never should have got it smooth if Karl hadn't held on like a soldier. But isn't it a beauty?"

I really suppose you have no idea what a difference that carpet seemed to make in the great front room. The walls had been made very

white before it went down, and of course the woodwork was as clean as hands could make it, but who would have supposed that the bright carpet would seem to set everything about it into a glow of beauty! Then they moved in the furniture. It had occupied an unused room during this time, and been carefully covered, so that really they had never half seen its beauty. But when they took their places, the couch in the pretty niche between the mantel and the south window, and a lovely table in the centre of the room, and the great chairs which seemed to fill up all the broad spaces at the right and left of the front windows, and the other chairs arranged by the tasteful hand of the mother, I am sure I wish I could give you an idea of how the room looked to them. The three-cornered piece of furniture over which Christie and Karl had wondered before it was unpacked, was still an object of curious interest to Christie. It was tall, and had what she called a steeple top, beautifully carved, and it had many shelves, and it fitted into one of the corners of the long room as though it had been made for that particular spot. But what was the name of it, and what was to go on all those pretty shelves?"

"They can't be for dishes," said puzzled Christie, "for people don't keep dishes in their front rooms, do they, mother?"

And the mother laughed, and said some people did, she supposed, but they had none to spare for the parlor. Then she brought forth her Eastern knowledge for the benefit of her little girl who had not been outside of her own plain home.



MOTHER TUCKER'S CHAIR.

"I know the name of it, Christie; it is a what-not; and people keep their pretty things on it—vases, you know, and shells, and treasures of any kind, and books."

"Books," repeated Karl wistfully. What the boy wanted was books.

"Books!" repeated Christie eagerly. What the girl meant to have, some day, was books.

"Well, we haven't any yet. We'll fill ours with books when we get them, won't we, Karl? But we have no vases, nor shells, nor treasures of that kind; what will we put on until we get

some? I like the name of it — 'what-not.' Hasn't it a pretty sound? What can we put on it?"

Then the mother stood thoughtfully looking into the days that were gone. At last she spoke: "We might bring out the big Bible, Christie, for the lower shelf, and the pictures of your grandfather and grandmother. I have one of mine; your Grandfather Tucker died before such things as pictures were known; then I have a few shells your uncle James brought from the Pacific coast. Oh, we can dress it up, I think."

No sooner said than done. So the handsome Bible, one of Mrs. Tucker's wedding presents, was brought out of its hiding-place in a large old trunk, and carefully laid in its place on the what-not. The first time a family Bible had appeared in the Tucker family.

"There never seemed to be any place for it," said Mrs. Tucker as she carefully took the tissue paper from the clasps. "I laid it away for safe keeping. But I always meant to get it out when we furnished the room. It fits nicely on that shelf; I like to see it."

And neither she nor her daughter realized that new furniture was beginning already to work for the honor of the "Elder Brother."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GIFT ACKNOWLEDGED.

THE next thing was a stove. The young Tuckers could not believe it possible that one was really coming, but father and mother were agreed that such should be the case. "It was queer," the mother said, "very queer indeed;" but when they were in town day before yesterday, they went into the stove store for a new shovel, and the man had offered them a second-hand stove as good as new, real cheap, and father had said then: "If we had anything to put with it in the front room we would buy that stove, for it is a bargain; and I don't know but we better, as it is, for we may never have so good a chance again." And they had talked about it all the way home, but it had seemed rather foolish to buy a stove when there wasn't another thing to help furnish with; and there, when they reached home, they found the furni-

ture had come ! So the first thing the father did next day was to send word to town that he would take that stove, and now he was going in to see about pipe and bring out the stove. Wonderful times had come to the Tuckers.

I am wrong, though, about the stove being the next thing. The next thing had been the writing of a letter to Mr. Thomas Fletcher. Christie's first letter !

It created a good deal of excitement in the Tucker family. The father himself went to town and bought a quire of nice paper and envelopes to match, and a new steel pen for Christie. She had a pen holder, and took daily lessons in writing, but the pen had done good service, and it was decided that for this occasion she ought to have a new one. "I thought I might as well get a quire while I was about it," Mr. Tucker said in a half-apologetic tone, as his wife looked at the paper, and he fancied he saw surprise in her face at the quantity.

"Christie will be writing other letters maybe, as she grows older. I would like to have her write to her uncle Daniel once in a while, and there may be others; this Mr. Fletcher might write to her again."

Nobody thought this very probable, and as for writing to her uncle Daniel or rather to his city wife, aunt Louise, Christie privately thought that she really would much rather write to Mr. Fletcher; she felt better acquainted with him. However, she rejoiced in her box of pretty paper, and gave it a place of honor on the wonderful what-not, and thereafter was busy during her leisure moments for two days, getting a letter ready to send to Mr. Fletcher. She wrote and re-wrote it on her slate, consulting with Karl over the sentences, until he knew them by heart, and sung them through the house to a popular tune, greatly to Christie's dismay.

At last the letter was written on one of the new sheets of paper, the envelope addressed by Christie's own hand, the important little green stamp affixed to the right-hand corner, and the document was ready for the mail. Not a bad-looking document either. You girls who dash off a letter every few days to somebody, being careless as to whether each word has the correct spelling, and each capital is in its place, and forgetting the punctuation marks altogether, and filling the lines with descriptions of things that were "perfectly splendid," when you only

mean that they were very pretty, or talking of something that was "just horrid," when you only mean that it was rather unpleasant, need not have been ashamed to have had Christie's carefully written letter travel in the same mail bag.

Really, before it is sealed you shall have a peep at it, just to see what you think of the little girl who had never been to school a day in her life.

" *Keweenaw, Jan. 18.*

"DEAR MR. FLETCHER:

"I remember you very well. I don't think I ever can forget you. I think of my journey on the cars a great deal. And now I have so many beautiful things to remind me of it all the time! I don't know how to thank you, but mother says if you knew how glad I was over them every day, she thinks you would be thanked. There was carpet enough for the front room and my room, and a nice large piece left over for mother's room. I wanted mother to have the whole one for hers, but she said that would not be polite to you, and that she would rather I had it anyway. I knew that, because she would rather we children should have things than to

have them herself. I suppose mothers are always so.

"The carpet is the — I was going to say the prettiest one I ever saw, but I never saw one before, only a rag carpet, and this doesn't look any more like a rag carpet, it seems to me, than the sky looks like our blue washtub!

"It is most the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life. Except the moss, and the real true berries out in the woods in the spring, I think it is *quite* the prettiest. I would like to have you look in our front room, it is so nice. My brother Karl says he should not know that he had ever seen the room before, it is so changed.

"The sofa just fits a place between the mantel-piece and a window, and the two lovely chairs are by the south window, and when the sun shines on them, they look as though they were made of moss. I don't let the sun shine on them much for fear it will fade them; only once in awhile, to make a picture. My little sister Nettie is trying to make a picture on her slate of one of the chairs, and she made one so natural that father said he could most sit down on it. The chair is large enough for mother and Nettie and the baby, and when father takes the other

one, and has Karl on one side and me on the other, he says, 'Now, mother, we are seated in our treasures, and our treasures are seated with us; who so happy as we?'

"And we are truly very happy indeed, and you did it all! I cannot think why you and the Governor were so good:

"Father thinks perhaps I ought to write a letter to the Governor and thank him, but I am afraid to do that, for I don't know him so well as I do you, and if you would only be so kind as to tell him when he comes to see you, how much we thank him, I will be very glad, and I am sure he will like that better than to be troubled with a letter. The bedstead fits right into a niche in my room. Karl thought it would; he measured it with his eye. I didn't think so, but Karl was right; father says he has a very true eye, and that he ought to have a chance to learn mathematics. Karl says he is going to learn them without a chance; that he hasn't time to wait for any chances. The flowers on the bedstead and bureau are so natural that my little sister tries hard to pick them, and she tries to pick the berries from the carpet, too, and looks so surprised when they won't come.

"We are going to have a stove in the front room, and once in awhile have a fire, so we can enjoy looking at all the lovely things. And now that we have the front room so pretty, we are going to invite the minister to tea. I wish you could come and visit with him; I know you would like him. His name is Mr. Keith. Mother thinks I am making my letter too long, and I do too; and it seems to me that I haven't thanked you much, after all. I don't seem to know how to do it. But I do feel so truly thankful in my heart, that I most want to cry sometimes, I am so happy. I want to ask you, sir, if you ever hear anything of that dear baby? I did love him so! I would like to see his sweet face and hear his pretty voice. I do hope he is well, and has kept his mother safe.

"Your grateful little 'sister,'

CHRISTIE TUCKER."

"For pity's sake, child!" the mother had said, "you are making that letter too long altogether."

"I know it," said Christie meekly. "But you see, mother, I don't know how to write a letter; I only just know how to talk to him as I

did on the cars, and he is different from other people; he seems to like talk."

"I don't know about your telling him all that about your father and all of us sitting in the chairs, and about the children with their queer fancies, it sounds rather familiar. What will he care about all that?"

"I don't know why he cares," said Christie, positively, "but he did care to hear about us all; and asked questions, how old Nettie was, and how the baby looked, and all that. Why, mother, he is different from other people, you know. Why did he care to send me all those nice things, do you suppose?"

And then the mother said, "Sure enough, and perhaps he would like the letter; she should, she knew, if she were away from home and it were written to her." And Christie said that her desire had been to let him see things in the front room and see how nice they looked, so that he would be pleased with all his work.

"You might have left that out about my having a true eye, and meaning to study mathematics; he certainly doesn't care for that, and it would have made the letter several lines shorter."

This was Karl's suggestion. But Christie declared that she wanted to say that, she didn't know why, she just felt as though it ought to go in and she meant to put it in. Still the letter did seem very long, and I don't know that it



AT LAST THE LETTER WAS WRITTEN.

would have been sent, had not Mr. Keith come out to make a call on the very evening when they were talking it over, and what did the father do but say :

"Let's leave it to Mr. Keith, he is used to letters. Christie, read out your letter to him and see if he thinks it is too long or too familiar."

Then had Christie's cheeks grown very red, and she had whispered to her mother that she was sure she couldn't do that. But Mr. Keith had seemed to be very much interested, and had urged the reading, and besides Christie was in the habit of obeying her father, and her mother whispered to her that she might leave that part out about inviting him to tea; so with a frightened little voice she began the reading.

Nobody knew what was the matter with Mr. Keith; he got out his white handkerchief, and coughed, and wiped his mouth and his nose and his eyes; certainly he seemed to have taken a hard cold since he came into the warm, bright kitchen! But no sooner was the letter finished than he cleared his voice to say that not a line of it ought to be omitted. He thought the old gentleman would feel grieved if there were one word less than had been told him.

"I don't understand writing letters very well," Christie explained; "this is the first one I ever wrote, and I kept forgetting it was a letter and thought I was talking with him; he

talked to me a good deal on the cars, and seemed to want to know about the children and everything."

"Of course he did," Mr. Keith said, and then he added something over which Christie pondered curiously for many a day. "See here, Christie, if I were you, I would not try to learn how to write letters, I would just keep on talking to people when I wrote to them; I think it is the best way for you."

Did he mean that she would never know enough to write regular letters? Christie wondered.

This settled the matter of shortening the letter. After Mr. Keith had gone, Karl sat looking thoughtfully at it, and at last burst forth with a new idea.

"Chris, they most always have postscripts in letters."

"What are postscripts?"

"Why, things that you put in after you think that you are all through. Down at the depot, while I am waiting for the milk train, the man at the desk is always reading letters; he reads aloud and the other one makes speeches. In almost every letter there is a postscript. Yes-

terday he was reading one about some corn that was to be shipped, and the other man said :

“ ‘Doesn’t he say anything about the bill? That is queer business.’

“ ‘No,’ Mr. Jones said. ‘Or hold on!’ and he turned over the leaf; ‘here’s a postscript.’

“ ‘P. S. You may draw on Jenkins and company for the amount due.’

“And the man over by the safe said: ‘He always puts the important part of his letter in a postscript.’ And they most always have them, don’t they, father?”

Mr. Tucker was laughing. There were things about his boy and girl which seemed to amuse him very much. “Why, if they have forgotten something that they ought to have said, they add it in that way,” he explained at last.

“But I want to know what it means,” persisted Christie. “I don’t know the word, and it sounds queerly; it has nothing to do with a post as I see.”

Whereupon Karl went to the shelf in the corner cupboard and brought out a little fat brown book with one cover gone; the old copy of Webster’s Dictionary that had come with them from their Eastern home. One of Mr. Tucker’s

dreams of future greatness was to own a Webster Unabridged; but every year there were so many necessary things to buy that Webster stayed behind.

"Postscript: a paragraph or part added to a writing."

This he read in triumph. But Christie remarked plaintively that it did not tell her *why*.

"I suppose Webster Unabridged would tell."

This the father said, and Karl added that he did wish that they had him under a bridge or on a bridge or *somehow*. Then they all laughed and felt better.

"They do have them, anyhow," affirmed Karl. "I've heard the men talking about postscripts often; and seeing you don't know when you will write another letter, I think it would be nice to put one in."

"Well," said Christie, meditatively, "there is something I have forgotten, would you put it in a postscript, mother?"

"If I wanted to," said the mother who often didn't know whether to laugh or cry over her children. Theirs was such a different childhood from hers. The old home had been full of books and papers, and letters coming and going were

not unusual things. She might have known much about Webster Unabridged to tell her children now if only she had cared to study it in her youth. What a pity it seemed to her sometimes that she could not have known in those old days in New England how much she would want to know to tell Karl and Christie some day. This mother had had chances, and had neglected some of them; her children certainly were not doing that. But bless your heart! I know children who are doing it to-day; and the time is coming to them swiftly when they will be *so* sorry!

"They don't write it out in full," explained Mr. Tucker, seeing that preparation was being made to add the postscript. "They use an abbreviation; a capital P and a capital S with periods after them."

"Is that so?" replied Karl, speaking very respectfully.

Every little while he discovered a mine of unexplored knowledge in his father, and felt his admiration of him rising.

And this was the way that Christie Tucker's already long letter came to have a P. S. added.

"P. S. I have thought a great deal about

what you said about my using the pretty carpet and the chairs, and all the lovely things, to honor Jesus with, but I don't think I know how to do it, only there is a boy and a girl who live pretty near us, their names are Lucius and Lucy Cox, and they are very poor, and their kitchen isn't nice and bright and neat like ours, and they never have nice things to eat, and I was thinking, maybe if I let them see all the pretty things and helped them have a good time, it would be using the things in a way to please the Elder Brother, but I don't know as it would."

"How shall I end it?" she asked at this point. "Do they end it again?"

But this Karl did not know. He had never seen postscripts, only heard of them; neither was the father sure whether it was proper to sign the name again.

"Dear!" said Christie. "I wish I knew! I had such a time finding a good way to sign the letter!" And truly she had! It took a half hour of discussion, and of trying the look of various ways on the slate, until she had settled down to the nice-sounding sentence:

"Your grateful little sister,

CHRISTIE TUCKER.

It certainly could not be right to put all that down again.

Then did the mother rouse from her musings. There had come before her as plainly as though written on the blank sheet of Christie's paper which lay in her lap, the memory of a letter received many years ago from an old uncle who had been in Heaven for fifteen years. A business letter it had been, short and to the point, as the old uncle's work always was; and his name had been signed in full:

"Your uncle,

"ELIAB PERKINS HOWE."

At the foot of the page there had been this:

"P. S. Niece Christine, have you given yourself, soul and body, for time and for eternity, to the Lord, and do you live as though you always belonged to him?"

E. P. H."

"You sign your initials," said Mother Tucker; "just the initials of your name — C. H. T., and nothing else."

"Do you?" said Christie, relieved and pleased. "Well, I can make a pretty 'H,' I think. I like that."

And while she carefully made her pretty "H" and Karl looked over her shoulder and advised,

the mother went back to the postscript of long ago, and remembered how far, how very far short she had come of living as though she belonged soul and body to the Lord, and wondered what she could do to make the fact surer to her own heart and to the eyes of her family. How industriously that new furniture was working for His glory! And nobody knew it.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNEXPECTED COMPANY.

A BRIGHT winter afternoon, and they were in the parlor having a wonderful time. The way that fire burned in that new stove was a continual source of delight.

No stove like it had the young Tuckers ever sat beside. Delicate little windows all around, which glowed and sparkled, or showed the forked flames of a lovely blue. Those great black lumps of coal looked so hard and gloomy when they were poured in, and took such beautiful hues soon after, that Karl and Christie were never weary of watching and speculating.

To-day, though, there was something of more importance than even the fire. For the first time in their lives they had invited the minister to tea. He had arrived in good time, and hung his overcoat in the little hall, and rubbed his

hands before the glowing fire, and taken a seat in one of the great easy chairs, and said, "Well, now, isn't this comfortable!" And the Tuckers, every one of them, thought it was. Mr. Tucker, at first inclined to be a little shy of the minister, had exerted himself as the host, and found it not so hard a thing, after all, to talk with a sensible man who knew something about farms, as well as books, and seemed anxious to know more, for he asked a great many questions concerning things that Mr. Tucker did not know he either thought or cared about. Then Karl, who had declared all the morning that he was not coming into the parlor at all, for he did not want to see the minister, and that the minister did not want to see him, had brushed his hair, and put on a fresh collar, and washed his hands until they glowed, and, when Christie, who had been sent to get the almanac to decide a question of dates, came back she found him sitting in a chair near the minister; that gentleman had his arm on the back of the chair, and was leaning toward Karl, and saying, "So, my boy, you see we must be the best of friends since we are namesakes." And Karl was looking pleased, and stayed and listened to

the talk until it was time to help with the chores. It was an afternoon to remember.

Other strange things happened. It was Christie herself who first saw the fine carriage and the gay horses and uttered an exclamation of surprise, almost of dismay, as they halted before the gate. Mr. Keith paused in his sentence, and looked out of the window.

"Ah," he said, "you are going to have more company I think, Mrs. Tucker; here is Mr. Burton's carriage stopping at your gate."

"Mother," said Christie, in a low, eager tone, "it is Wells, and he has to walk with a cane; shall I go to the door, or will father?"

"Why, your father will see to it, child, he has been sent here on an errand I suppose."

So Mr. Tucker went out to receive Wells; but his errand apparently was not at the door, for he came limping in.

"How do you do?" he said heartily, not a bit embarrassed by his cane. "This is Mrs. Tucker, I believe; I am very glad to see you, ma'am, because you are my friend Christie's mother. I should never have been here to see you, but for her, you know. That is, I mean I should not have been anywhere." He stood beside Mrs.

Tucker, shaking her hand, and looking handsome and happy. Christie had slipped into a seat at her mother's side, but he turned to her. "Here is my travelling companion; you reached home safely, I see; so did I, thanks to you. Aren't you glad to see me? I have been in a tremendous hurry to get out here; came the first day the doctor would let me. Won't you introduce me to your friend and your brother?"

Poor Christie's cheeks glowed hotter than the fire. She had never introduced any people in her life! It was worse than a postscript to a letter; how did they begin, she wondered. But Mr. Keith did not want an introduction:

"I was waiting for my turn," he said cheerily. "I am glad to see you, sir; I know your face very well by this time, and your name, so we ought to consider ourselves acquainted, though you were not at home when I called on your mother."

They were shaking hands by this time, like old friends, and Christie could only look on and admire; how easily it was done. Then Wells turned at once to Karl:

"We are acquainted," he said, "if Mr. Keith is right. I have known this long time that you

were Karl Tucker, and I suppose you have known that I was Wells Burton; so now let us shake hands and consider it settled."

What a thing it was to know just what to say, and how to say it, and to feel so much at ease! It seemed so pleasant to think of this boy shaking hands with Karl. He was much taller than Karl, and looked a good deal older, and of course he knew more; but she could not help wishing he knew how strong Karl was, and how helpful to his father, and how sensibly he talked about the work on the farm. "He has almost as good judgment as a man," she had heard her father say; if Wells Burton knew those things, he could not help liking Karl, even if he did blush and look down at his strong boots and feel unable to say a word before the handsome city-bred boy. But Wells did not wait for words; he had already turned back to Mrs. Tucker:

"My mamma sent a message by me, ma'am: she is very sorry that she has not been able to call and see you, since my accident and escape; she thought of writing, but she said you would know how hard it was for a mother to put her heart on paper, and she hoped every day to get out here, but my brother had an alarming illness

that has kept her right at his side day and night. And my father was telegraphed for, on the very evening on which I was hurt, and went East by the morning train, where he has been detained ever since. He wrote that he was afraid you and Mr. Tucker would think he was a man without a heart, but he hoped to be able to convince you to the contrary very soon. He is coming home to-morrow, and will be out as soon after reaching home as possible, but I was resolved on being first."

It sounded just like a speech in a book! Admiring Christie could think of no other way to describe it to herself; and as for her mother, she was as bad as Karl, she could think of nothing to say. To be sure she had said to Christie only a few days before, that "a body would think the Burtons might say 'thank you,' when all the train-men said that Christie's quick-wittedness had saved their boy's life;" but then she had not expected thanks, for she had added as a sort of second thought to her first remark:

"To be sure we don't want their thanks, and they would feel kind of foolish trying to give them, for of course they are thankful, and they know that we know it, so what's the use?"

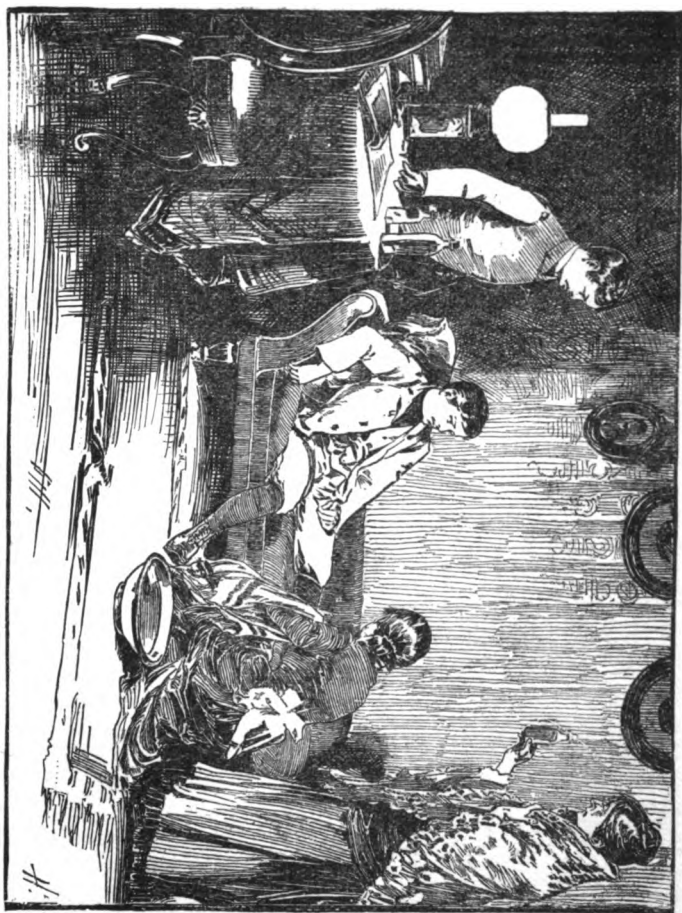
This, however, would not do to say to Wells, and so while he waited, his bright glad eyes fixed on her, she blushed and stammered a little. It would not do to say she would be glad to see his mother, for she felt in her heart that she did not want to see her ; so at last she said :

“Why, as to that, folks can’t *say* things in this world of that kind, they can only feel them ; and as for Christie, she only did what was right.”

The bright-eyed boy laughed. “Yes,” he said, “it was right, but the thing was, to think of it, and then to do it in a hurry ; it was grand, wasn’t it, Mr. Keith ?

“O Christie, I saw one of your friends, yesterday ! I haven’t told you why I didn’t get here before ; I came out one day last week, on purpose to see you, and getting off the cars I forgot all about my lame ankle, and gave a hop that sort of twisted it, and it kept me awake half the night, and on the sofa all the next day, and as I had promised mamma to be back in the city by the next night, I had to go without doing what I came out for ; well, going back I saw the mother of the baby”—

“My baby ?” eagerly interrupted Christie,



"IT KEPT ME ON THE SOFA ALL THE NEXT DAY."

forgetting all about listeners, and intent only on hearing from the dear baby whom she had taken into her heart that day.

"Yes; your baby. I knew her, of course, the moment I caught sight of her, the mother, I mean, and I went forward and took a seat near her, and asked at once after his majesty. She said he was well, and in his grandmother's arms, she hoped, at that moment. He had not been on the cars since that dreadful day, and she did not know as she could ever let him go on them again. She begged his grandmother not to let him out of her sight while she was away. I couldn't help telling her that I thought it was the baby who ought to have arranged for her to be looked after; he didn't get lost, I told her; if I remembered correctly it was she who was missing; the baby was in his seat, and remained in the cars until he reached his journey's end, but she was the one who skipped."

"Did you tell her that?" asked Christie in great amusement; she was thinking how impossible it would have been for her to have talked in such a merry way with that grand lady.

"Yes, I did," he said laughing. "We had such a time doing without her that day, that it

seemed to me she didn't fully appreciate which of them made the trouble. She says the little fellow is well, and as bright as ever. I told her I knew he had strong lungs; she laughed a great deal over my story as to how he managed us all that day. She asked a hundred or so questions about you, and when I told her that I hoped to see you in a few days, she sent a message by me; I was to tell you that she had been sick, and had not been able to carry out certain plans; which was the reason that you had not heard from her, but she thought you would in a very few days."

"Heard from her!" repeated Christie, her eyes bright with excitement and surprise. "Why, is she going to write to me? I never thought of such a thing. Oh, Karl, there will be another letter to answer!"

"Sure enough!" said Wells, looking over to Mr. Keith and laughing outright. "It is very strange that she should ever think of you again! Probably she wanted her baby to bump around on that floor and kill himself; and was a little disappointed because you didn't allow him to do so."

Over this Christie exclaimed indignantly;

then followed a good deal of animated talk — questions and answers about that baby and that baby's mother. Wells was so bright a talker and was so undoubtedly interested in the baby, that Karl was drawn out of his reserve to ask questions and offer suggestions, and at last the young people were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

"We are left out in the cold," said Mr. Keith, smiling, as at last the three heads drew nearer together and the voices dropped a little. Then he drew his chair a little nearer to Mr. Tucker, and the mother slipped away to see about the nice supper she was preparing, giving the minister a chance to speak some earnest words that he very much wanted to speak. "I say, Christie," said Wells, suddenly looking at his watch, "I suppose I must go home, unless — do you think you could coax your mother to let me stay to tea?"

"Why!" said Christie, shocked at that way of putting it, and gleeful over the suggestion, "would you really stay? Mother," — as that lady entered the room again — "Wells wants to know if he may stay to tea?" Her voice was merry and her eyes were dancing. Karl looked

at her in silent amazement. The idea of their Christie being well enough acquainted with that handsome young fellow to call him "Wells," right before his face; and the idea of asking if he might stay to their house to tea!

"Why, why!" said Mrs. Tucker in a flutter of surprise, "what a question, child! Don't you know we shall be glad enough to have him, if he will?"

"Well, he will;" said the young visitor joyfully. "It is dreadfully lonesome at home; nobody there but the housekeeper, and the rest of them; no, ma'am, my people are in the city; but they are coming out the last of the week. I shall like to stay very much indeed; I'll go right out and tell Dennis when to come for me."

He reached for his cane, and Karl sprang to wait on him, and to offer to do the errand, and finally they went out together, and stood by the handsome carriage which had just drawn up in front of the gate; stood there and talked, first with Dennis, and then with each other, and at last walked slowly back toward the house, and then turned off and went to the barn. Christie from the window watched them until the great barn door closed after them, then gave a

little sigh of satisfaction. It was very nice to think of Karl and Wells Burton as having a visit in the barn together. Karl could certainly never be so much afraid of him after this as he had been; and would not look so sober, and so sort of "left out" when she told him things about that journey connected with Wells.

Mr. Keith watched her happy face. "What is the pleasant thought that shines on it?" he asked her. Christie turned suddenly and found that she was alone with the minister. She blushed a little and came away from the window, and following his motioning hand, took a seat quite near him.

"How is it, Christie," he asked, "in all these happy times, and with the pretty room to sit in, and the new friends to think about, and their presents to enjoy, does the best Friend seem nearer or farther away?"

"O Mr. Keith! he isn't far away. It seems to me as though he came nearer every day; and there was something I wanted to ask you; mother said perhaps you would help us. These things, you know, this pretty furniture, and the carpet, and everything, they were to be used

for the sake of the Elder Brother ; that is what he said, and of course I must use them so or I would not have any right to them ; and I don't think I know how. Mother and I have tried to think of ways, but I can't seem to settle on any. Could you help me, sir, if you please ?”

“ Why, I think you have found ways already. Haven't the pretty things helped you to make a chance for me to come here and visit you, and get acquainted with your father and have a little talk with him about this Friend ? You know he has been busy, or away from home when I have been here before ; but this afternoon he stayed at home to visit with me, and we have had a pleasant talk.”

“ Oh, but,” said Christie, her eyes bright, “ those are lovely things that we like so much ; they are just helping ourselves ; we wanted you to come a good while ago, but we never could fix things so that mother thought they would do. But we are just doing this for ourselves, because we like it ; this isn't work for Jesus.”

“ You can't be sure of that, little friend ; the fact is, when we really want to please him, nearly everything that he gives us to do becomes after a while, such pleasant work that we

would rather do it than not, just for our own sakes."

"Is that so?" she asked, surprised "I was



MR. KEITH.

looking for a hard thing to do. Are there not some hard things, sir? I thought of one that I

would not like to do, and that perhaps I ought; but I don't know about it, and mother said she didn't; she said perhaps it would do more harm than good, but I might try it if I thought best, and I thought I would wait until I asked you."

"Tell me all about it," he said, sitting back in his chair. "Some things look hard on the outside, but have pleasant things hidden inside the shell, like a nut, you know."

"Well," said Christie, smoothing out her white apron, "you know those Cox people who live on the next street, back from the road a little way?"

"I am not sure that I do. Cox? I don't remember that name; the next street above here?"

"Yes, sir; well, it isn't exactly a street, it is a sort of lane; they live in a little log house; I don't suppose you are acquainted with them, after all; they are very poor, bad-acting people, at least the father is; he drinks hard cider most all the time, and they don't ever go to church; and the children, Lucius and Lucy, are about the age of Karl and me; they are dreadful acting children, and they are not clean. Lucy doesn't

have her hair combed, and Lucius has holes in his clothes, not patches, you know, but *holes*; they must have dreadful times! I went to the house, one day, for mother; their baby was sick, and they had sent for mother, and she sent to me to bring her some things, and it was a dreadful looking place."

"And what was your thought about them, little sister?" The minister's voice had a very gentle sound, almost a humble one, if Christie had known it; he was beginning to wonder whether God had sent him there to *get* some help, as well as to give some.

"Why," said Christie, twisting the hem of her apron a little, in her embarrassment, "I didn't know but maybe if I had them here one day, and showed them my pretty room, and all our nice things, and tried to be real pleasant to them, and treat them like company, and we got them a nice tea, warmed potatoes, and good healthy things, you know, and a little bit of cake, maybe it might do them some good; but I wasn't sure, because they would have to go right back home, you see, and maybe be hungry the very next day, and sleep in that dark room off the kitchen, where the baby was sick, and mother

said she did not know, she was sure, whether it would do good or harm."

"And that was one of the hard things which you did not want to do? Can you tell me that side of it? I mean, can you explain why you did not want to do it?"

"Why, you see, they are not very clean, their hands and faces, and I thought maybe they would handle our things, and leave dirt marks on them, and sit down in these pretty chairs, and soil them; and, oh, I don't know, there were other reasons. Karl said we would not know what in the world to say to them, and I don't suppose we would. But then we were all willing to try, if it was the right way, but none of us knew. We asked father, and he said Mr. Cox was a poor shack, and he guessed there couldn't be much made of his family, and maybe the best way was to let them alone; but then, the next morning he said that maybe that wasn't the right kind of talk, and we must do, mother and I, as we thought best, and you see we didn't know *what* we thought."

"I see," said the minister, and he drew out his handkerchief and wiped his face and his eyes. Then he was still for so long that Christie

thought he had forgotten all about it. At last he spoke: "I believe, Christie, if I were you, I would try it; there is nothing like trying. I don't know the Cox children, nor their parents; I passed that old house last week and wondered who lived there; I am glad to find out. You are helping me, you see, and but for these pretty things, perhaps you would never have told me about the Cox children. What if you carry out your plan, and have that nice supper, with the warmed potatoes, you know, and invite me to come too?"

"Why, would you?" said Christie, too amazed to add another word for a moment, then she said: "Well, if mother will, I will."

Then the door opened, and the two boys came in from the barn.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MINISTER AND THE BOYS.

IT was Christie's turn now to slip away; she remembered something that she was to do towards the coming supper; the minister and the boys were alone. "Well," he said, looking at them with smiling eyes, "what next for you two?"

"School for me, sir," Wells said, "and I shall be glad to get to studying again; I have had a longer vacation than I planned."

"Do you go to the city every day?"

"No, sir; not this term. Mamma is so nervous over the accident that she doesn't like the plan; yes, sir; they are coming out next week to stay; my brother, who is an invalid, has taken a fancy to the country, and is in haste to get back; the rest of the family think it rather dull, all but me, I like it; but mamma is not reconciled to a daily ride on the cars, so my father has engaged

a tutor for me ; he can teach music, as well as Latin and the other things, so I shall not have to go into town for lessons. I like the plan ever so much." And the favored boy looked over at Karl, who was regarding him with wistful eyes.

"And what about Karl? Is it school for you too?"

"No, sir," he said slowly, choking down a little sigh, "not this term ; father can't arrange for us just yet ; we are out of the township, you see."

"I see. Well, you and Christie study at home, I suppose."

"A little," said Karl, but he did not speak as though the studies at home gave him great pleasure. He did not mean to tell those two that the great drawback was books, or rather the want of books. What would either of them say, he wondered, if they knew that there were not more than a half-dozen books in the house, counting the primary arithmetic, almost every word of which he and Christie knew by heart ! Latin ! It was almost disheartening to hear Wells talk so glibly about "Latin and other things." He had tried to get his father, only the other evening, to remember a Latin word

until he, Karl, could see how it sounded ; but not one could be thought of, save *E pluribus Unum*, and neither mother nor father were absolutely sure of its exact meaning. Karl meant to study Latin, one of these days, but he did not expect to for some time to come, neither did he intend to tell his plans to these favored people who talked about Latin as carelessly as they might about geography. Truth to tell, Karl's present ambition was a new arithmetic, and that he meant to have very soon ; but it too was a secret.

"There is one book," said Mr. Keith, "which gets neglected. If I could go back and be a boy again, I am sure I would study it most faithfully ; that is, if I could take back into boyhood all the knowledge I have gathered by being a man ; I should know it was the most important book to study that there is in the world."

Karl was watching him with eager, expectant eyes. It would be a Latin book, he thought ; possibly not, for Mr. Keith, he had heard, understood both Greek and Hebrew, as well as Latin. It would be a thing worth remembering, what such a scholar thought the most important book in the world.

Sometime he would try for the book and study it hard. "What book is it, if you please?" He asked the question very timidly, waiting for a little, in the hope that Wells would do it for him.

"That is the Bible, my boy; there has never been a book written half so important as that, and there never will be."

To say that Karl was astonished, will give you a very faint idea of his state of mind; also he was a little bit disappointed. He had expected to hear some wonderful old name to treasure in his mind, and then he had meant to try to get courage to ask a few questions about the book, what made it so wonderful, and how old one had to be before he began to study it, and what it cost; but the Bible! Why, they had one in the house. Of course it was an important book, but then, who would have imagined that he meant the Bible! Wells was not surprised; he was more familiar with ministers than was Karl, and more familiar with the world; he knew what rank the Bible held among Christians. He looked neither surprised nor particularly interested; though his face told as plainly as words that he did not agree with Mr. Keith.

"The question is, how much time do you two boys give to the most important book?"

"Not much," said Wells, laughing a little. "We don't use it in school, and don't get marked for not knowing anything about it, so it has to stand aside."

"I know. Isn't that a strange way for sensible people to manage? Now if I were a teacher, I should try to give a little time each day to the only book that was likely to outlive every other, and had to do with another world, after this one was done with."

Karl opened his eyes wider, and Wells questioned: "Why, you don't suppose the Bible will be taken to Heaven, do you?"

Mr. Keith laughed a little. "Well, as to that, I don't know as it would be a very interesting book in Heaven. We shall probably not care much more about it than we would for a good guide book about Europe, after it had shown us the way there, and we were perfectly familiar with the country and had not the least desire to go from it to any other country. I meant that it was the only book which told us anything about the other world where all our life is to be spent, except the very little bit that we spend

on this side. It is strange to be so taken up with the things we are to use here, that we forget all about what we are here for, and forget to get ready for our journey; now isn't it?"

Karl was thinking seriously, and seemed to have no answer; and Wells did not choose to make what might be called an answer, though he spoke: "I don't think the Bible tells very much about Heaven. I've often wished it told what the people were doing up there, and how they managed about—well about everything, and whether they knew what was going on here, and what was to be done after everybody had reached there."

"I don't suppose there is special need of having all that told in the Bible; the people who are going there will have eternity in which to learn all about it, and to the people who fail, it could only be an added sorrow; the most that the Bible is engaged in, is to point out the way, and warn of the dangers."

Mr. Keith spoke very gravely, but Wells seemed determined to speculate, so continued: "What do you suppose the people do there, all the time? I should think it would be sort of stupid to stand around with harps and sing."

"The Bible says that it has not even entered into my heart what we are to do ; but I am going there to find out. The question is, are you two boys ? "

"I suppose I mean to," answered Karl gravely, seeing that Wells was not going to speak, "but I haven't made any plans, nor thought about it much ; it doesn't seem very real to me ; I know a hundred things that I want to do here, but I don't know much about Heaven."

"That is just what I am saying is strange ; like a boy who was so interested in the flowers and stones which he found on the way to the city, that he would pay no attention which road to take, and forget all about his having started for the purpose of going to the city. If there was an elegant home waiting for you there, and you might risk the loss of it by delaying and playing with the stones, how long do you suppose you would play ? "

"Not long," said Karl, his face grave.

But Wells had found his voice again. "Ah, but sir, we can't die and go to Heaven just when we please. It would be wicked to do it even if one wanted to, and a fellow could reach the city just as soon as his feet would carry him."

“That is true; suppose we change the figure. What if the carriage to take Karl to the city and to his wonderful home there, was to pass



EVEN THE BABY CALLED FOR MORE. .

the South road at the corner, at some hour to-morrow, Karl did not know when, and that was to be his opportunity to go, after that it

would be too late ; how long do you suppose Karl would loiter on his way to the South road in the morning ? ”

“ Not many minutes,” said Karl, speaking quickly. “ I should clip it at the first streak of daylight ; in fact, I don’t know but I would go down there to-night.”

“ I think quite likely you would ; and yet, here you sit, unconcerned ; it is morning with you, and the chariot of God may be here at any moment for his children who are ready, to take them home, and you do not get ready to go.”

“ It seems different,” said Karl.”

“ Yes, and it is different,” stoutly declared Wells. “ There is no corner to go to and wait ; if it were that way, we would all go in a minute, but there doesn’t seem to be anything to do.”

“ Yes, there is ; your mind can take a journey just as well as your body ; you want your mind to go over and stand by the Lord Jesus Christ ; you want your soul to say to him : ‘ I have come to claim my home in Heaven that you said you had for me ; I have come to be ready to go. Now, what am I to do ? ’ And he would tell you what to do. It is simple enough, you see, only you don’t choose to do it.”

‘Why doesn’t everybody?’

This question was from Karl; it seemed to him all at once such a simple and natural thing to do, and he could not help wondering what kept people back.

“My boy,” said Mr. Keith, turning and looking full at him out of earnest eyes, “why don’t you?”

Karl moved uneasily in his seat and laughed a little, and said: “I don’t know.”

“But I do, my boy. It is because you are a slave; so is Wells, here; he thinks he is free, and can do just as he pleases, but Satan has a strong hold on him, and is making him do just the foolish thing about which we have been talking.”

“Then we are not to blame,” said Wells quickly, following with his keen mind the picture that the minister had drawn.

“Are you not? Suppose an enemy had tied you to that stove in such a manner that the flames would reach you after awhile, and I should say: ‘I will cut the ropes and set you free if you want me to do so, and will obey my directions in the future. Then I should proceed to give you a list of directions, and you

should say : ' Why, they are all good, and right, and kind ; and we shall be the gainers by obeying them, but then we don't want to ask you to free us, and we don't care to follow your orders.' Who would be to blame for your remaining slaves ? ”

“ Wouldn't you be kind of mean, though, not to set us free, whether we asked it, or not ? ”

Of course this bold question came from Wells. Karl looked quickly at him ; he thought the question rude : but the minister seemed in no way disturbed by it.

“ That depends, ” he said quietly. “ Let us look at it a little more closely ; suppose you belonged to me by right. It was your duty to obey me, and you had not done it ; instead, you had disgraced me in many ways, and were under sentence of punishment ; but I, at great expense, had planned a way for you to escape all punishment ; a way which I knew would work if you could be brought to agree to it, and do your part, but which I knew would be worse than useless unless you submitted to the rules laid down ; we will suppose that I knew you would get into much worse trouble than being tied to that stove, in case I let you go in any

other way than the one which I had planned. Would I be mean, then, not to do it?"

"That is supposing a great many things," said Wells, and he spoke as though he felt almost cross about it.

"It is not supposing a thing, but what the Bible, if you study it carefully, will show you is true; not the being tied to the stove, of course; we imagined that, but God is very well acquainted with us, and he knows what we will do, as well as what we have done."

"How could you prove to me that you were anxious to save me, and had done your best, if you should let me stay there and burn?" asked Wells, going back to the figure.

"I might not be able to do so; you might not choose to believe my word, and you might be too foolish to reason about it. But if I had a son, whose life I had given in order to try to save you, and if you believed that I loved my son, unless you were very foolish indeed, it would go far towards showing you that I had been in earnest."

"I think we would be great fools not to ask you to untie us," spoke out Karl in some heat.

"It seems to me that you would be very

foolish ; and Wells thinks so too, but he doesn't care to tell us so."

Then came Christie, holding Nettie by the hand, and carrying the baby in her arms.

"Christie," said Mr. Keith, "come here and tell us what you would do if you were told to choose one book out of all there were in the world, because the rest were to be burned."

"Why!" said Christie. "How dreadful! Oh, I would take the Bible, of course."

"Why of course?"

"Oh, because it is the only book that shows us the way to Heaven ; and we could get along without knowing anything else, if we knew what was in the Bible ; and if we knew all that there was in all the other books, and had no Bible, in a little bit of a while what good would it do us?"

"Sure enough ; but do you believe these boys don't think so !"

Christie turned on the two troubled eyes. Wells laughed, but Karl said stoutly, "Why, we didn't say any such thing !"

"Didn't you ? I thought you both agreed that you paid very little attention to it ? And of course, if you thought it so important, you

would give it a good deal of time and thought ; that would be common sense, you know."

But neither Nettie nor the baby were in the mood for any more quiet talking. Mr. Keith took the baby, and the two went into a frolic ; while Wells set Nettie on his knee, and began a wonderful story of two pigs and a monkey.

It was a wonderfully pleasant evening ; the supper was delightful ; even the baby waved his spoon and called for " more." The chickens were stewed in cream, and the potatoes were made into the loveliest little brown balls ! Mr. Keith ate two balls, and asked Christie if these were " warmed up " ones, and whether warmed up ones could possibly be better.

Then Mrs. Tucker looked so puzzled that Mr. Keith felt obliged to explain that he had been invited to a tea party, or rather, to be truthful, had invited himself, and that there were to be warmed up potatoes. Then Wells questioned and cross-questioned, until it finally all came out about Lucius and Lucy Cox ; and he asked a great many questions about them, and sent Christie off into a burst of laughter by inquiring whether Lucy looked like " Sarah Ann."

But no one save Christie heard his whisper,

just as he was going out of the door after Dennis came for him :

"I say, Christie, may I come to the party? Do ask me; I'll be as good — O, as good as anything you can imagine; and I like warmed up potatoes better than anything."

And so Christie, in much bewilderment and some dismay, found a party growing on her hands, and wondered what she should do with them all.

She and Karl sat up for half an hour after the minister went home, to talk over all the strange events of the day. "He liked the farm horses," said Karl, meaning Wells did; "he said they behaved much better than his pony, and he should think it would be great fun to ride without any saddle or halter."

"Karl," said Christie, "did he tell Mr. Keith he did not believe the Bible was an important book?"

"No;" answered Karl indignantly, "he did not say such a word. All he said was, that they did not pay much attention to it at school; and that he did not know much about it, because he did not read it very often."

"Well, that was saying that he did not think

it important, I suppose; we say things by our actions, Karl, though I never thought of it before. It seems queer that we can be telling people things without meaning too."

"It isn't true," persisted Karl; "I think the Bible is important, of course; and I don't read in it once a month."

"Well," said Christie, gravely, "if you had a geography, Karl, one of the new kind, you know well enough you wouldn't let it be in the house for a month without reading a good deal in it; now would you?"

But Karl declared that he was as tired as a dog, and was going right straight to bed. And to bed he went.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER LETTER.

EVERYTHING in the kitchen was cosey and bright, in excellent order, and very nice work was going on. Christie having once fully decided the matter of inviting Lucy and Lucius Cox to tea was in haste to carry out the plan; and that very morning a cake was being made to do honor to the occasion. Cake was something rare in the Tucker family; in her Eastern home Mrs. Tucker had been in the habit of spending every Saturday morning in her father's well-stocked kitchen, stirring up sweet mixtures for the next week's supply. This was when she was a girl. Mrs. Tucker in her Western home, had now and then baked a gingerbread, or made what she called a "batch" of seed cakes, or, on rarer occasions a pan of doughnuts, but, as a rule, it had been as much as they could do to furnish bread and beef and potatoes; and

cake of all sorts had been left in the background.

"I don't know when I have done such a thing," said Mrs. Tucker as she broke the third egg into her yellow bowl, and then began to whisk them about with skilful touch. "It seems kind of extravagant, but I don't know how to make this cake with less than three eggs, and it is the one that I seem to remember the best. I used to like to make it, because it always behaved itself; never fell, nor cracked, nor anything."

"The hens laid a good many eggs this morning," Christie said encouragingly. "It seems as though they must have known what we wanted to do. I packed just as many for the grocery as usual, and yet had these five left. I don't think it is extravagant, mother; it isn't for us, you know, it is for the Cox children, and they never have a bit of cake, I do suppose."

"Good bread and butter and plenty of it would be better for them, child, than cake."

"Oh, I know it; but then bread and butter don't seem quite such a treat as cake; though that day when I was on the cars, and ate a piece of 'Sarah Ann's' bread and butter, I thought that a slice of our bread would be as great a

treat as I could give her. It doesn't seem to me as though I *could* eat a piece of bread at the Cox's. Mother!"—A sudden thought had come to her, and a look of dismay passed over her face as she set her bow of flour on the table.—
"What if they should think they must ask us sometime to come to their house to tea!"

Mrs. Tucker stopped her egg-beating to laugh.

"What an idea, child!" she said. "They haven't a whole plate in the house, nor a decent dish of any kind; and as for company, such a wild thing never entered their minds. You needn't be distressed about that. I wonder what keeps Karl? I'm afraid I shall have to wait for that baking powder. Hurry with your flour, Christie, and then beat that butter and sugar to a cream. When I have cake, I like to have it nice. I'm sure I hope I haven't forgotten anything. It is so long since I have done such a thing as make a nice cake, that I'm in a kind of a fluster. If I had known that Burton boy was to have been here the other night, I suppose I should have made a cake then; though I don't know as I would have thought of such a thing now, if you hadn't coaxed. I heard Mr. Keith say once that he liked soft gingerbread better

than any kind of cake, and I'm sure he ate it as though he did."

"So did Wells," said Christie, laughing; "he asked me if I thought you would see him if he took a second piece. Mother, shall I put in the raisins now?"

"Why, no, child, of course not; they don't go in until the last thing, and they have to be rolled in flour first; what a little dunce you are about cake, to be sure; when I was of your age, I could clip into the kitchen and stir up a cake for tea as quick as the next one. But then," she added, seeing a sober look steal over Christie's face, "I couldn't have made a dress for myself to save my life, nor worked over butter, nor done a dozen of the things that you can. Of course, it is not strange that you should know nothing about cake-making when you never had a chance. One of these days, Christie, money may be easier, and I can hunt up all my own knowledge and teach you how to do things. I'll risk my forgetting; it all comes back to me this morning as naturally as though I had been doing it every day; though it must be about thirteen years since I made this cake," she continued.

But the sober look on Christie's face had

nothing to do with cake. Something in her mother's talk had made her think that she was growing up a dunce about other things ; things which she wanted to know much more than she did how to make cake. It came out, presently, as she thoughtfully beat the butter and sugar.

"Mother, what about school next term ? Has father made up his mind ?"

Then the mother sighed.

"Why, as to that, Christie, he didn't have to do much thinking ; he can't raise the money to pay for books and tuition, and that is the whole of it. Not this term — he thought he could, and if it had not been for that stove, I guess he would have brought it about ; but that was such a chance, a second hand, to be sold so cheap, and we had wanted one for so long ; and the man offered to take his pay in eggs and butter, you know ; he said last night he wouldn't have bought it, after all, if he had known it would keep you and Karl back from school for another quarter ; but he thought then he would get his pay for the hay this month sure."

"And isn't he going to ?" Christie tried to keep her voice steady.

"Oh, no ; he got word at the depot yesterday

that the man couldn't pay until spring if he did then. Sometimes your father is afraid that he will never pay it."

This last fearful possibility was spoken almost in a whisper. Not to be paid for the hay meant a good deal of trouble to the Tuckers. Christie stirred away, saying nothing, not trusting her voice to speak; in fact, she was much engaged just then, in ordering back a tear that wanted to roll down her cheek. She did not mean that her mother should see tears; but it was a great disappointment. Even the Geography on which she and Karl had so long set their hearts, seemed slipping away into the dim and uncertain future. There was all that money paid for the trip to uncle Daniel's, where, after all, she did not go; should she be sorry that she took the journey? But then, there were all the lovely things in the front room, and in her room; she would not have had those if she had not gone a journey. No; but then, the lovely things would do nothing to make her less a dunce, and she and Karl were growing old so fast! But then, on the other hand, she would not have become acquainted with Wells Burton, nor had that beautiful letter from Mr. Fletcher, nor seen the Governor, nor

taken care of that dear baby; perhaps the baby would have fallen from the seat and hurt himself, if she had not been there to watch and care for him; and perhaps,—oh! wicked Christie to forget that — perhaps nobody would have stopped the train in time to save Wells Burton's life! Oh, indeed, she must always be glad and thankful that she went her journey, even if they had to wait another year for the new Geography.

Now another thought began to trouble her, and presently she put it into hesitating words: "Mother, maybe we ought not — maybe I ought not to have coaxed you to have this party, and make cake and all these things."

But the mother's voice was brisk and reassuring.

"Now, child, don't you go to fretting over that; it was a nice thing to think of; Mr. Keith told me himself that we couldn't any of us tell what it might do for those Cox children; and as for the expense, it won't be so very much, after all; potatoes are cheap, and we have milk enough to make them nice; it is half in having things done nicely and making everything bright and clean, you know; the Cox folks might have nice warmed potatoes themselves if they only knew

enough. Then it is as you say about the hens, they appeared to understand, and did a little extra work, and the butter and sugar we can easily save from our own things, and we sha'n't notice the extra expense at all; it isn't like paying out money downright from one's pockets. The cow and the hens have furnished the most of the things, and we won't begrudge the poor children one good supper. Run to the window, child, and see if Karl isn't coming."

Christie was glad to go; not so much to look for Karl as to get rid of that tear. Her mother knew that, too, and sent her away to help her get her happy face back. Mothers know most things, though some of them are wise enough to keep quiet about little matters that are better not spoken of.

"Here's Karl," the sister said, in a very few minutes, and the "happy" had already gotten back into her voice. And Karl came in with a gust of outside wind, and with an air of unusual importance.

"What a time you have been, child!" declared the mother. "Did you get the baking powder, and the spool of thread, and all?"

"Yes'm; I got them all, and something else

besides. I guess you would have been a long time if you had had to do all the business that I have attended to since I've been away. Father sent me to the post-office for old Mr. Stuart's paper, and I thought seeing I was there, I might as well ask for us, and what do you suppose I have for you, Miss Christie Tucker?"

"Not another letter?" said Christie in high excitement, every trace of anything but delight having gone from face and voice.

"Just that," answered Karl, and he dived into his deep pocket and produced a delicately perfumed bit of paper, with "Miss Christie Tucker" written on it, in what Christie thought was the very prettiest way she had ever seen. The writing was certainly not Thomas Fletcher's. Whose could it be? Mrs. Tucker left her cake for a moment and came with floury hands and a bit of flour on her left cheek and looked over Christie's shoulder and admired the dainty thing, and wondered from whom it could be, and as yet none of them thought of looking to see. "It is not your aunt Louise's writing," she said, "though your aunt is a pretty writer, too, but it doesn't look like that, somehow; what a woman you are getting to be! 'Miss Christie

Tucker!' the idea." She laughed as she said it, and yet it seemed to give her a thought that had a sad side to it.

"I suppose you'll grow up to that without fail, if you live," she said, and looked at her young daughter wistfully as she added: "I would like to do a good many things for you before that, though."

"Do open the thing!" said Karl. "If it said 'Mister Karl Tucker,' you wouldn't catch me gazing at the outside all this time."

"It wouldn't say 'Mister' to you, Karl."

"Why not, I should like to know, as well as 'Miss' to you?"

"Because they don't. It would say, Master Karl Tucker."

"Master of what? How do you know?"

"I saw it. I saw a letter that came to Wells Burton. He took it out of his pocket to mark on, when we were on the cars and he wanted to show me how the switch was laid, there by the junction, and he marked on an envelope, and I saw the name — "Master Wells Burton."

"Well, I don't care whether it is 'Master' or 'Mister,' I should get into the thing and be master of it."

Thus urged, Christie, mindful of her former lesson, looked about for the scissors, and began to cut, then paused half-way across the end and said, "I think father ought to be here."

"Well, he won't be here until noon; he has gone to the upper lot. She can't wait till noon, can she, mother? It might be something that would need an answer right away."

"I guess I wouldn't wait, my girl," the mother said, pitying the eager faces. "Father will understand, and you can read it out to him as soon as he comes, and it will sound better after you have read it once." Oh, wise mother! There were other things beside cake-making that she had not forgotten.

You don't think anything about them now, dear girls, but the time will come when you will look back on all those little thoughtfulnesses of mother, as so many jewels which she left you.

The letter was withdrawn from its cream-tinted cover, and all three heads gazed at it curiously. Beautiful writing it was, certainly, but strange to them. The only way to discover the author was to read it. To be sure Karl said: "I guess it is from the mother of the baby;" but Christie replied quickly:

"Oh, no; she would not write such a long letter as that. There wouldn't be anything to tell me only that the baby is well. Oh, dear, I hope he is!" This touch of anxiety quickened her fingers and she unfolded the lovely sheet and read aloud :

"MY DEAR LITTLE MOTHERLY FRIEND —

"Whom I am sure I shall never forget if I live to be a hundred. And baby shall not either; I shall always talk to him about you, and how you saved his precious life, and when he gets to be a man he shall come and see you.

"Now you wonder why I have not written you before." ("No, I don't," said Christie, breaking off to look at her audience; "I wonder why she is taking the trouble to write to me now. Isn't it nice, mother?")

"I'll tell you how it was. Baby came through his day of troubles like a soldier, because he had such a nice little general, who did not let him take cold, or bump his head, or go hungry. He did not so much as sneeze after it all, but his poor silly mother could not get over her fright.

"For three nights I could get no rest at all; as soon as I would drop asleep I would dream

that I had lost my baby, and was tramping up and down that track like a wild woman, and begging the people to send me on in an extra train whether there was any road to run on or not. Then I would waken in a fright, with my head throbbing so that I could not raise it from the pillow. At last my dreams frightened me into a fever, and I was for more than a week that I could not set up. Then it took some time after that to get my strength sufficiently to go down town. I wanted to select baby's gift for you myself" —

"(O, mother, she is going to send me something. What do you suppose it can be?)"

"Chris, what if it should be a Geography, with nice large maps in it, you know. Did you say anything to her about one that day?"

"Not a word," said Christie, stopping to laugh; "I didn't say anything to her, hardly, nor she to me; she was so busy kissing the baby that she couldn't.") Then she read on — "because I knew just how I wanted it to sound." ("Sound! What can she mean? What in the world can it be?"

"It is a bird," said Karl, "they have them in cages. Nick says there are three at the Bur-

tons, in the room where they keep the flowers."

"O, mother," said Christie, looking troubled, "I most wouldn't want it. I would like to open the door and let it go and live in the trees."

"They can't live in the trees," said Karl. "Can they, mother? They would starve."

"That is because they have been stolen away from their homes and made slaves of. Isn't it, mother?"

"Read on, child," said Mrs. Tucker, "perhaps it isn't a bird.")

"I have chosen one that I like very much, and I can seem to see you taking comfort with it. It is the baby's very own present, and he sends it with his dear love.

"The little things that are packed in the small box are presents from baby's mamma to your dear baby at home; I hope they will fit, and the dolly is for the little sister Nettie whom you described to Mr. Fletcher. He told me all about her, and about how you made a dolly for her one day last summer out of a squash."

("Why, child," said Mrs. Tucker, "it does seem to me that you must have told those

strangers in the cars everything we ever said or did in this house."

"No," said Christie, earnestly, "he kept asking me questions, Mr. Fletcher did, and when I answered them there would be a word in about something else and he would ask about that."

Mrs. Tucker had in the meantime gone back to her cake, and was now ready to transfer it to the buttered tin which stood waiting to receive it.

The letter was almost finished; there remained only a few words about Baby, how he was growing, how sweet he looked in his new hat, and how he had sent her a picture of his own dear self to wear around her neck, and wanted her to come to the city as soon as ever she could, and have hers taken for Baby to wear. Then came the wonderful closing sentence: "If you will write me a line to let me know when you will come, Baby and I will meet you at the depot with the carriage, then we will have a very happy day together. And I do hope that manly brother of yours will come along to help you, for if you have as many people to care for as you did on your last journey, I am sure you will need help."

"And she never says what it is she has sent!" Mrs. Tucker said when the last word had been read.

"No, ma'am, she doesn't. I think it must be a bird, for what else is there to make a sound that I could take comfort with?"

"I know one thing with which I could take comfort," said Mrs. Tucker with a little sigh, "and it makes a sound, too."

"Mother, what is it?"

"It is a sewing machine, child. I could sew a seam on that in five minutes, which takes me almost an hour, now. But never mind, one of these days you children will get me one, I dare say."

And Karl, though he said not a word, went and looked out of the window, and laid it aside in his heart, that as soon as ever he could, perhaps even before he bought the Geography, he was going to get a sewing machine for his mother.

For the rest of that day, the cake which came out of the oven a golden brown, and did neither fall nor crack, did for all that sink in importance before that wonderful mystery which was to come, and was to be in a box; because the

letter had talked about what was in the "smaller box." It took no fortune-teller to assert that of course there must be a larger box in which "it" was to come. The bird theory rather lost ground, because how could a bird travel in a box? It would die; but it certainly was not likely to be a sewing machine, for besides being a very expensive present, it was one not likely to be chosen for a little girl.

Mr. Tucker had a theory which he told his wife had better not be mentioned to Christie, for fear it was not correct and she would be disappointed; but Mrs. Tucker argued that Christie was a very womanly little girl not likely to be greatly disappointed about anything that could not be helped, and that she liked to know about things. So the father brought forward his views.

"I can tell you what it might be, my girl, though, mind, I don't say it is. Did you ever hear of such a thing as an accordion?"

No, Christie never did, but her bright eyes said she was all ready to be told of it.

Then it was brought to light that Mr. Tucker when he was a young man had boarded with a woman whose daughter had an accordion. "It

is something like that old fire-bellows of your grandfather's," he explained. "You take hold of it on each side and pull it out and back again, and out and back, like this;" and he folded a piece of paper which lay on the floor and illustrated the method of working the accordion.

"But what is it for?" questioned puzzled Christie.

"Why, it makes music; you learn how to play it, you know; it has keys to it, and you learn which ones to touch, and play tunes."

"Real tunes, such as folks can sing?"

"I guess you can! Why, Elizabeth used to sit by the hour playing for us, and we would sing; real sweet music it was, too."

"Oh, my!" said Christie, and her eyes seemed almost as large as the saucers she was drying.

"But they were pretty expensive things," said the mother warningly, mindful of the wistful light in her child's great eyes.

"Yes," said Father Tucker quickly. "Oh, I didn't say I thought this was one. I only said it was something that would make sounds, and nice ones too. But it is not likely to be anything of that kind."

"Of course not," said Christie. "But, father, how much do you think one would cost?"

"Well," said Mr. Tucker, reflectively, "I remember how much that one cost, as well as if it were bought yesterday. I remember there being a good deal of talk about it; there might have been cheaper ones, but that cost twenty dollars."

"Oh, my!" said Christie again.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

IT was the next day at noon, or a trifle before, that the boxes arrived. The same good-natured men who had loaded down the parlor with furniture, appeared again, and one of them told Karl with a laugh, "he reckoned he must have found out by this time that Miss Christie Tucker lived here, for she seemed to have a good many things coming to her, off and on."

But Karl was so amazed at the size of one of the boxes, that he had no answer ready for this hint at his former bewilderment. He stood dumb with astonishment, while the two men and the two helpers that they had brought with them, tugged and groaned and with the greatest difficulty lifted their burden.

"I don't know whether it is a meetin'-house or a new schoolhouse," declared one, "but it seems to me it is rather heavy for either."

The Tucker family were all at home, and had as much as they could do to keep out of the way of the men, and to wonder what the thing could be, and where it was to go, and whether, after all, there wasn't some mistake.

Don't expect me to go over in detail, all the excitements of the hours that followed. Mother Tucker said afterwards, that she was sure she should go crazy if she had another day like it in her life; and it might have a bad effect on her to hear all about it.

All I can tell you about it is, that after much trial and much delay, and much running to the far lot for helpers, the thing was stood up and unpacked, and when it first showed its shining surface, Christie gave a queer little squeal and clasped her hands, and grew white even to her lips. "I thought as true as the world that ridiculous child was going to faint!" Her mother said, when she told off the strange doings to her friend the next day, fanning herself with her apron at the thought of it, though the day was cold. "I did really, and she don't know anything about such a thing, either. I never fainted in my life, and I don't mean she shall, if I can help it. But she turned that white, that I just

reached out and snatched her, and it's my opinion if I hadn't, she would have tumbled right down in a heap! It seems she had some kind of a notion how a piano would look. She has dreamed about one, and talked about one, and asked me questions enough, until she had got an idea, and she knew the thing by hearing and imagination. She knew it was a piano the minute her father took the last covering off. But she had had no more idea of ever seeing one in our parlor, than she had of seeing a star there, not a bit more. Karl, now, isn't of that sort. He was excited enough, but at the same time he was quiet about it, and did not seem so dreadfully astonished.

"I really don't know what to make of that boy. He seems to have such queer ideas about things. 'I meant you should have one, sometime,' he said to Christie, 'but I did not think it could be brought about so soon.' Christie does all the imagining, and she is first-rate at it, and Karl always seemed to stick to facts. But then, he has such extraordinary things that he calls facts come into his head! 'When you get your sewing machine, mother,' he said to me one day, 'will it sew overhand, do you think?' Now,

I expect to have a sewing machine about as much as Christie expected a piano, and no more, and I told him so, and says he: 'That may be, but there's the piano setting there, you see, and the machine will come, you see if it don't.' "

The visitor knit twice around her stocking before she answered; then she pushed her spectacles up on her forehead, and said: "Well now, Mrs. Tucker, I shouldn't wonder if it would, and if that boy would get it for you one of these days. I do say that you are blessed in your children if ever a woman was."

So now the secret is out, and you know it was actually a piano that was set up in the Tucker parlor.

I took this way of telling you, because I really could not explain what Christie felt, or even what she said, though she said little enough.

In fact, her mother who was a little frightened about her, told her that she acted like a goose. The white look on her face lasted until her father called her to put her hand on the keys; and when she touched the gleaming things, thereby bringing forth such sounds as she had dreamed of in her little music-loving heart, but never heard, she looked up into her father's

face, and the blood rolled up in great waves to the roots of her hair, and then what did she do but cry.

Of course Nettie cried immediately and loudly. Tears on Christie's face were something unusual, and not to be borne without a protest. I don't know as it is any wonder that the startled mother was ready to say just at this point :

"Why, Christie, what does make you act so like a little goose?"

But Father Tucker put his great protecting arms around her and said: "Never mind, mother, she is kind of upsot, and it ain't to be wondered at. Pianos don't grow on every potato lot, and our little girl never even saw one before, and this thing is hers, you know, and it is kind of too much."

She got over it after awhile, and had only very rosy cheeks and bright eyes all the afternoon. The pretty music stool was unpacked and Christie mounted it, and drew forth such soft, sweet sounds from the wonderful instrument that her father said admiringly: "Well, I declare! I thought they had to spend months learning to play the piano, but I don't see but

you make pretty music on it, without any learning."

It was that very afternoon that Lucius and Lucy Cox were to come to tea. "Enough in itself to upset a whole family," Mrs. Tucker said, "and when you added a piano, it was, as Father Tucker said, 'too much.'" But that afternoon is the very thing that you must hear about.

The first one who came was Wells Burton. "I didn't mean to come so early, for fear I should be in the way," he explained, "but it is lonesome enough at home. My mother was hindered from coming home yesterday, my brother isn't so well, and father has been delayed by a freshet, and everything was disappointing and dismal, so I ran away. I would have gone into town this morning if it had not been for the warmed-up potatoes, you know, and other things. Besides, I was in a hurry to see something that I knew had come."

"Oh," said Christie, her eyes aglow, "do you know about it? Did you know before? Come in quick and see it. I don't know what to think nor to do."

"What you must do is to take music lessons, and make the thing talk to you," Wells said,

walking into the bright little parlor and going boldly up to the great shining beauty which seemed to the rest of the family to fill all the space in the room. Wells seemed in no wise amazed at its appearance, called it a "neat little thing," drew out the music stool, adjusted it to the right height with great deliberation, and then seating himself, whirled his fingers over the keys in a fashion that almost took Christie's breath away. The sounds that he produced were quite unlike those which Christie had made. Even Father Tucker in the kitchen, wiping his great brown hands on the great brown towel felt that, and stopped and listened and nodded his head, and said: "That is music, eh, mother! Our girl must make it go like that."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tucker, "that is music; just think of that boy being able to play like that!"

There was a worried look in her eyes, and after a moment's silence she added: "That will be the next thing. The child will want to learn, and she will be crazy to, I can see it in her eyes, and how is she ever going to do it? Music lessons cost a sight of money, even East, and of course they are worse out here, every

thing is. And you know, Jonas, we might as well try to have her fly and be done with it, as to give her a chance to take music lessons."

Her father laughed. "I should as soon have tried to fly myself as to get her a piano, and yet there the thing is, and she is playing on it; there's no tellin' what may come, in this world, I've given up trying. We must talk with the minister about it. There may be some kind of a way of turning work. Who knows?"

But the troubled look did not go out of the mother's eyes. "There's another thing," she said, as she laid the spoons she had been polishing, in a shining heap on the white table. "Jonas, don't it seem wonderful strange to you that they should send her such a great big present as that? Why, pianos cost almost a fortune. And that is a good toned one, I remember the one at grandfather's well enough to know that. I don't see but it sounds every bit as good as the one at uncle Daniel's, and to send it to a stranger and a little girl! I don't understand it, and sometimes it doesn't seem quite the thing for us to let her take such things as a matter of course and say nothing."

"Well, now," Father Tucker said, taking his

wet head out of the shining wash basin and beginning to polish his face on the towel, "there's two ways of looking at things. In one sense it is a big present, and a wonderful thing to happen to a little girl like Christie; and in another sense, how do you suppose it compares with that baby of hers that Christie took care of? I don't say but that it would have got taken care of some-



BEGINNING TO CRY.

how if Christie hadn't been there, though there didn't seem to be a great many people of sense to depend upon that day, besides Christie; anyhow, she was the one did it, and did it well, and while she didn't do it for pay, nor expect pay, still, I suppose it was an awful day to the mother; and if I was rich, and it was our baby, seems to me I wouldn't consider even a piano very great things when it came to showing what I thought of my baby."

"Well," said Mother Tucker reflectively, "that way of looking at it does make a difference, to be sure. What are forty pianos compared with a baby?"

Meantime, in the front room, the same thing was being talked about from a different standpoint. "Did you ever hear of people doing such a wonderful thing?" This was the question that Christie asked of Wells. He let the music soften, so he could answer.

"Why, it was a nice thing, and I rather like my lady for thinking of it. It is the first time I have forgiven her for leaving her baby and spoiling our day, but on the whole I am glad now that she did it. But as to being wonderful, it was natural enough. Her husband is a piano dealer; they have a great warehouse on Pearl street full of pianos, of all sorts and sizes, and when she heard that you liked music, and wanted to see a piano, what was more reasonable than to suppose that you would like one of your own?"

"How did she know that Christie wanted to see a piano?" asked Karl, who was watching this entire conversation with the greatest interest.

"Why, you see, we spent quite a long day together when we went our journey, and we talked about a good many things, pianos among the rest, and I suppose somebody happened to

mention to her something that Christie said. Look here, let me play this *Rain Dance* for you, and you listen and see if you can't hear the drops patter ! ”

There were reasons why Wells did not want that subject looked into any farther, so he bewitched them with the raindrops.

During the playing, the door opened softly, and there came in Lucy and Lucius Cox. I wish I had photographs of them for you. They had been all day getting ready to make a good appearance. Lucy had not only combed her black hair, but banged it, and the straight locks hung down over her eyebrows, straight into her eyes, so that she winked and blinked continually. Her brown calico dress was soiled and torn, but she had pinned the torn place as well as she could, and then tried to cover its defects with a bit of very soiled, very faded pink ribbon which she had knotted up and fastened over it, and as the rent was half-way down the skirt on the left side, towards the back breadth, you may imagine how she looked. Face and hands, however, were clean, and poor Lucy having put on an old-fashioned linen collar of her mother's, that had not been used in seven years, nor washed,

had done all that she could to honor the great day. Such efforts were beyond Lucius ; but he, too, had combed his hair, and washed his face and hands, and tied his shoes with green strings, and although his clothes needed washing and patching, on the whole, he looked better than Karl had feared.

Christie turned toward them timidly, and glanced in great doubt and distress from them to Wells. He did not know them, and she had a dim idea that they ought to be introduced, but how was it to be done, and what would he say ?

"I am glad you have come," she said gently. "Will you sit down ?" Now what should she say ? "This is Mr. Wells Burton ?" And if she did, what would they say, or would he notice them ?

He did not give her long to study the question. He swung himself from the piano stool and went towards the staring children. "How are you, Lucius ?" he said, nodding pleasantly, as though they had visited together all their lives. "So this is your little sister Lucy. Why, Lucius, how far ahead of her you have grown ! Aren't you the same age ?" Lucius nodded.



LUCIUS AND LUCY COX.

"And yet you are a head taller! That's good. I always like to see a boy taller than a girl. He can take care of her better. How old are you, Lucy? Ten? I had a little sister once who would be just your age now if she had lived. Her name was Lorine. Well, what are we going to do first?"

"What's that?" asked Lucy, pointing her small thin finger at the shining case of the piano.

"That," said Wells, "is a music box. It plays any tune that you are a mind to make it. Do you want to hear it?" He seated himself again on the music stool, and the group closed in around him, while he rushed through waltzes and marches, and snatches of tunes which he hummed and whistled. Christie in her delight and relief almost forgot that she was hostess and had the great care of entertaining the Cox children on her heart. Indeed, from that moment she had no need to feel it a burden. Wells gave himself to the work with such zeal and success, telling stories, singing songs, playing tunes, answering questions, that, when promptly at five o'clock Mr. Keith made his appearance, he found the five young people well acquainted and apparently entirely satisfied with one another.

There was no denying that both Lucius and Lucy were a good deal startled at the coming of the minister. They knew him by sight, and had scud over the fields in alarm many a time to avoid speaking to him, or rather having him speak to them, but, finding that he took very little notice of them, that the others were glad to see him, and that he gave most of his attention to the new piano, they settled down, the startled look going out of their eyes, and I don't think either of them know just when they began to join in the talk, and even answer the minister's questions, without feeling afraid.

And now the supper was ready. That wonderful supper, the like of which the Cox children had never seen. How their plates were heaped with the warmed-up potatoes, what dishes of hot apple sauce did they make away with! And as for the bread, Christie had as much as she could do to keep from looking her astonishment, for though the visitors were frightened at the idea of sitting down to a table covered with a white cloth, and using knife and fork, yet the taste of the food had overcome their timidity to such an extent that they gave themselves up to the joy of eating and having enough.

It was when they were all back in the parlor, the father talking with Mr. Keith, and the young people gathered into a corner by themselves, that Lucy Cox spoke suddenly, with the air of one who had puzzled over this thing long enough and now felt determined to have satisfaction.

"Look here, I want to know now what you did it for?"

"Did what?" asked startled Christie, for Lucy had pushed away her bangs and her great black eyes were fixed on Christie's face.

"Had us come here, me and Lucius, and eat supper and have cake and milk and good things, and sit in your big nice chairs and see that machine and all. What did you do it for?"

Her voice was so loud and earnest that it had stopped the talk of the boys, and Wells was looking right at Christie with a curious smile on his face, that said to her:

"Yes, if you please, I am interested in that very same question. What did you want of the little Coxes?"

"We wanted you to have a good time," said Christie, looking down, her cheeks growing red. "We thought you would like it and we wanted you to."

"What for?" It was Lucy again; she had a talent for asking questions, it seemed, and she kept those black eyes fixed on Christie.

Wells laughed a very little, he could not help it. That was coming right to the point. Why should she be so anxious to have the little Coxes have a good time? To be sure he had a dim idea what she was after, but how was she going to explain to them? That was just what Christie did not know. She hesitated a little, and glanced timidly up at Wells. He would help her if he could; she began to understand this thoroughly, but his face told her that he did not see how she was going to answer this. She looked over at Mr. Keith, but he was busy with her father, their voices dropped low, and their faces looking as though earnest words were being said; Christie would not have interrupted them for a great deal. She must help herself out, and to do so she must begin at the beginning.

"Do you know about Jesus Christ, Lucy?"

"No. I don't want to know any stories now. I want you to tell me what you did this for?"

"I am trying to tell you. Don't you truly know anything about Jesus Christ?"

"No."

"Then," said Christie, a little shocked, and more doubtful than ever how to tell her story, "you know about God, don't you?"

"Not much; and that hasn't got anything to do with it, anyway."

"Yes, it has. It has everything to do with it. Lucy, you know God made you, don't you?"

Lucy nodded.

"Well, He wanted you to have a good time here, and He wanted me to, and everybody, and He made a beautiful world and sunshine and everything so we could, but there is a wicked spirit named Satan who hates us and wants us to be ugly and unhappy; he made us do wrong things. Lucy, do you know about Heaven?"

"No."

"Well, that is the world where God lives, and it is beautiful and there is nothing bad there ever, and God wanted us all to come there and Satan didn't. Then Jesus, God's son, said he would come and help us, and he came away from Heaven and died for us, and helped everybody, and showed us what to do to get away from Satan, and get ready to go to Heaven."

"But I want to know what you wanted Lute

and me to come over here to supper for, and gave us lots of good things. That don't tell."

Christie looked pained and puzzled, and stole another glance at Wells, which made that young fellow feel as though it would be worth a good deal to understand this story as well as he did multiplication, for instance, so that he might help Christie. But he had not the least idea what to say, so he kept still. Christie tried again.

"Lucy, I belong to Jesus Christ. I am his servant, and he told me he wanted me to ask you to come here and have a good time."

"Why does He?"

"Because He loves you, and wants you to belong to Him. He has a beautiful place in Heaven that He wants you to live in, and He wants you to get ready to go."

"How will I get there?"

"Why, He will send for you as soon as you are ready. But you must get ready first, and there is a good deal to do."

Lucy looked down at herself.

"I haven't got any better clothes," she said gravely, "and I haven't got any more ribbon to cover up the holes; I found this on the road."

I can't get any more ready than I am. And I don't know as I want to go, anyhow. Besides, you ain't told the truth; that ain't got nothing to do with Lute and me coming here to supper."

"Look a here," said Lucius, speaking for the first time, "you had better keep still. We're having a good time, and you needn't go and spoil it."

CHAPTER XX.

ENTERTAINING COMPANY.

I DON'T want to spoil it," declared Lucy, "I want to know why; and she said she'd tell me."

"I tried to," said poor Christie, "but you don't understand. Lucy, see here, if you knew Jesus Christ, you would understand all about it."

"Where is He?"

"He went back to Heaven; but He can see from there away down here, and hear what we say, and He tells his servants what to do. He told me to ask you to come here to supper, and make you have a good time."

"I don't believe it."

What was to be done with the little sceptic? Poor Christie looked from one to another of the group in dismay. If there was any one thing she had been in the habit of, all her life, it was

being trusted. What to say next to a person who coolly told her she did not believe what she had said, was more than Christie knew. Wells looked both troubled and amused. The ignorance of the little heathen before him was simply amusing to him, but he was troubled to think that he really did not know how to help Christie in the least. At this point, Mr. Keith drew his chair toward the circle. He had heard some of the last words, while Mr. Tucker was answering a call to the kitchen, and it seemed to him time to give the young hostess a little help.

"What is being talked about here?" he asked, smiling brightly on them all, especially on Christie who gave a relieved sigh as she saw him move toward them.*

But Lucy did not choose to pitch her red-hot questions or denials at him, so sat silent and abashed. Christie gently explained.

"Lucy wanted to know why I wanted her and Lucius to have a good time, and I told her Jesus told me to make them as good a time as I could, and she doesn't think that can be so."

"I see," said Mr. Keith; "she does not know Jesus, and does not see why he should care whether she has a good time or not. Is that it?"

Lucy nodded. Mr. Keith looked about him to see what he could find to help in explaining a wonderful old truth to this little dark mind. Mr. Tucker had come back from the kitchen and had Nettie in his arms, and she was intently listening to him. The two sat down together in one of the chairs near, and there was such a look of fatherly love and care on Mr. Tucker's face that the minister thought he would serve as an illustration for Lucy.

"I want you to look at Nettie in her father's arms, and then look at his face, and tell me whether you think he would like to make her very happy in any way that he could."

The entire group turned and looked at the father and daughter who were having a good time without knowing that they were helping anybody. Lucy, after a steady, searching look at them, turned to Mr. Keith again and nodded her head.

"Very well. Now suppose that a bad man should come in at that door and try to get Nettie to go with him. Do you think her father would be willing she should go, and make no effort to save her?"

Lucy violently shook her head.

“Well, did not Christie tell you that you belong to the Lord Jesus? Nettie only belongs to her father because God gave her to him, but you belong to Jesus because he made you and keeps



THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER WERE AN ILLUSTRATION.

you alive. Now can't you see that he wants you to have a good time, since he took the trouble to make you and take care of you?"

Lucy considered. She was losing her timidity.

Her fierce little heart was full of new and strange thoughts; it was time she understood some of them.

"Why don't He give me good times, then?" she asked, and her voice was fierce. "We have horrid times at our house, always."

Mr. Keith needed another illustration.

"Lucy," he said, bending toward her, "you remember that bad man whom we supposed might come after Nettie? Suppose he were here, and Nettie should want to go with him, and obey him, and her father should set her down and say to her: 'My little girl, this is a bad man; he will do nothing but harm to you, and if you will come to me I will see that he never touches you, and I will see that you get safely home to a beautiful place I have waiting for you, but you must choose which of us you will obey, or else I cannot help you,' and suppose Nettie should choose the bad man?"

Karl and Wells looked at each other, for both saw that this was the same sort of illustration which had been used for them, and had made them decide that they were fools, but Lucy did not understand as well as they had.

"She wouldn't do it!" she exclaimed in tri-

umph. "Nettie wouldn't go with the bad man a step. She would run right to her father."

The boys laughed, but Mr. Keith sighed.

"Yes," he said, "I think she would; and that is just the difference between her and you. This Jesus who owns you, has been calling to you all your life, coaxing you to choose between him and the bad master who wants you to follow him, and you have chosen the bad master."

"I haven't," said Lucy, her dark face growing red all over, and losing every vestige of her timidity. In her rage, she stamped her foot. "I haven't, either! It is no such thing. He never said a word to me, nor the other one either. I never heard them speak in my life. And I wouldn't do no such thing as that, and you needn't say I would."

Mr. Keith bent forward and spoke low. "Lucy," he said, "will you listen to me very carefully? I want to tell you a story. There was once a little girl who had a baby brother, and she took him out, one day, in the fields to play, and set him down by the bank, and he rolled over and got his dress and shoes all wet and muddy, and spoiled a ribbon that the little sister had laid in his lap. Now this little sister

ran over to him, and as she ran she heard two people speaking to her. One said, 'Little rascal! He is always getting you into trouble, and now mother will whip you for letting him get muddy, and he has spoiled your ribbon, too. Shake him as hard as you can, and slap his arms and his hand.' The other voice said, 'He couldn't help tumbling over; he is only a little fellow. He did not do it on purpose; and he does not understand that he has hurt your ribbon. Kiss him, and tell him you are sorry he fell; and tell mother that you will take better care of him next time.' Those two voices were, the Lord Jesus who made this little girl, and the bad man who wanted to keep her away from her home in Heaven that Jesus had made ready for her, and the little girl said to Jesus, 'I won't! I won't! I'll slap him as hard as I can. I don't care if he is a baby.' Now which master did she choose to obey?"

You should have seen Lucy's face then! It was a curious study! Red, indeed, but not angry; rather astonished beyond words to express, and ashamed. She dropped her eyes to the floor, and made no answer at all, and had no question ready.

After a moment's waiting, Mr. Keith said gently :

"There are always those two voices talking to people, and they are always choosing which they will obey. The thing is that it has been left for them to choose. The Lord Jesus wants willing servants. We must decide for him, then he will do all the rest. It is true that he told his servant Christie to ask you and Lucius to come here to-night, and to make you as happy as she could, and to tell you what he wanted of you, but he will not make you love him whether you want to or not ; you can still go on serving the bad master if you choose. But you must not blame him for not giving you a happy life if you will not have him for a friend."

Mrs. Tucker had now come in, and Mr. Keith withdrew his chair and joined the other group. The boys looked at one another, and then at Lucy, who still had her eyes on the carpet. It was an embarrassing time. Nobody knew what to say next. At last Wells came to the rescue.

"What if we young folks should play some games together? Christie, do you suppose your mother would let us go to the kitchen?"

Christie arose promptly, giving Wells a grateful look as she hastened away to make ready the room.

I suppose the little Coxes never even dreamed of a nicer time than they had there for the next hour.

It appeared that Wells not only knew all sorts of games, but he knew how to explain them to others, and to be patient with dulness, and good-natured over mistakes.

And you know yourselves that it is not every boy or girl either who can do these last things.

The fun grew so great that after a time the father and mother and minister came to look on. Yet through it all, Lucy Cox kept a watchful eye on the minister and on her opportunities, and when at last she stood close to him she said suddenly, speaking low :

“ Who told you ? ”

“ Who told me what, my child ? ” he answered, thus suddenly called from the bewilderments of blind-man’s-buff.

“ That about me and Tommy in the field.”

He bent toward her :

“ My child, no one told me. I saw it. I was passing that way, and I saw little Tommy fall,

and I saw the shaking and the slapping; and I am so well acquainted with Jesus and with that evil spirit that I know as well as though I had heard them, that one was coaxing you to do right, and the other to do wrong. And I saw you choose to do the wrong thing."

Lucy pushed up the handkerchief from her blinded eyes and looked around her, half frightened.

"I didn't see no one," she said doubtfully.

"No, the trees hid me from your view; but I saw you and Tommy distinctly."

"But I mean them other two."

"Lucy, don't you know that you cannot see them with the eyes that you have now? They are spirits, and our eyes are not made to see spirits."

Lucy sniffed contemptuously and drew down her handkerchief. "I don't believe in nothing that I can't see!" she said, with a logic and wisdom worthy of some who are older than she, and ought to know more.

She was caught just then, and had to go through the ordeal of being discovered and taking her turn as catcher, but it took her not two minutes to lay hands on Wells, and the moment

her fingers touched the nap of his coat sleeve she triumphantly announced his name: "It's that Burton boy. You can't humbug me!"

A few moments more and the changes of the game brought her back to the corner where Mr. Keith still stood.

He bent towards her: "Lucy, did you ever hear the wind blow?"

"Course!" said Lucy, utter contempt in her voice. She thought the minister was being very foolish in his talk.

"Then you are sure that there is such a thing as wind?"

"Of course I am."

"But did you ever see the wind?"

And now, for the first time, Lucy discovered where her own logic had led her.

She said not a word in reply for several minutes: not indeed until she had made the circuit of all the corners without getting caught, and was back beside him again. Her voice had changed its tone and was almost gentle as she said: "But I can hear the wind plain enough."

"And you can hear those two, speaking plainly to you, whenever you choose to listen. They speak low."

Apparently Lucy had had all the lesson her mind could grasp. She said no more. Indeed there was little time after that. The game broke up. The carriage came for Wells and he invited the minister to ride with him, and the minister asked if there was not time for one song and a prayer. So they went back to the front room and Wells played *There's a Land that is fairer than Day*, Mr. Keith taking a song leaflet out of his pocket to furnish music, and then he and Wells and Karl sang it. Christie tried to; it was one of their Sabbath-school pieces and she knew it well, but it made the tears come so to hear the familiar tune ringing out to her from the keys of her own piano, that they choked her voice. Lucy and Lucius could only listen and stare. They had never heard the song; they knew nothing about Sabbath-school.

Wells and the minister talked about that as they rode home in the carriage.

"Those little chips ought to be gotten into the Sabbath-school," Wells said. "They say they have never been in their lives. Why, they are regular little heathen! Christie says they have no clothes to wear. I must talk to my mother about that."

But the minister, though he was interested enough in the Cox children and glad over the thought of getting them to Sabbath-school, made a different answer from what Wells had expected. "After all, my boy, they seem to be not much farther away from the right road than you and Karl and some others who have been in Sabbath-school all your lives, or at least have been to church and known all about these things. So far as the getting home is concerned, I suppose it makes little difference whether we are not on the right road because we do not know about it, or because we do not choose to take it, though I admit that it might make a great difference in the degree of blame that belongs to us."

What was a boy like Wells to answer to such a sentence? He thought about it awhile, and then concluded that there was really nothing to say. And once more he wondered why he had been and continued to be such an idiot.

It was nine o'clock of the next forenoon. The kitchen where the Tuckers sat with their work was as neat and trim as Christie's hands could make it. She had washed and dried and set away the dishes, while her mother mixed bread, and then she had swept and polished the

stove and done all the last little things to make a room look neat and comfortable, while Mrs. Tucker washed the baby's face, and fed him his bread and milk and tucked him away for his morning nap. Now she was sitting by the window, a round basket beside her full of bright-colored rags which she was stripping into pieces about half an inch wide, and Christie was hunting her thimble to be ready to sew them together and make more of the plump bright balls which were slowly gathering in the barrel in the wood-house cupboard. The Tuckers had been for nearly three years getting material enough together to make a rag carpet. It was slow work, because in that family things had to be worn a very long while before they were ready to be stripped into rags. If it had not been for their friend the tailoress, who declared she had not time to make a carpet, and who saved all the waste bits for the Tuckers, it would have taken them longer. As the matter stood now, mother and daughter were beginning to say cheerily to each other: "By next winter I guess we will have rags enough for a bedroom carpet, and won't that be nice?" Time was when their hopes had been to get enough for the great front

room, but as that had blossomed so lately into a carpet with real flowers and vines, it was mother's bedroom that was thought of now. There was a rag carpet already on the floor, but it was very old, and looked uglier every day to Christie, who knew how she wanted "Mother's room" to look.

They three, mother and Christie and Nettie had the room to themselves. Nettie occupied her own little chair and was hushing her dolly and occasionally speaking low to her mother. "Couldn't you tear rags a little softer, don't you think? I am afraid my baby won't get to sleep to-day if there is such a noise."

The mother laughed a little, reminding her motherly daughter that her baby slept right through all the noise, but promising also, in soothing tone, to try to be more careful.

Now she held up a worn little skirt to the light and appealed to Christie as she came with needle and thread.

"I don't know about this, child. Perhaps we ought to save it. It would just fit Lucy Cox, and while there isn't much strength to it, it would be better than none, as long as it lasted. I don't believe that she had any on yesterday."

"I know she hadn't," Christie said. "Her



CHRISTIE'S IDEA OF "MOTHER'S ROOM."

dress skirt came unpinned and I fixed it for her, and I saw she had none on. Mother, I wish we could think of some way to get clothes for them, so they could go to Sabbath-school. You don't know how strangely Lucy talks! She don't understand about things, and you can't tell her, because, someway, there is no place to begin, though Mr. Keith did make her understand a little. He knows how. Mother, he made a story out of father and Nettie that helped her to understand about God. I wish you could have heard what he said. It was such a nice thing, and Nettie looked so cunning in father's arms."

"He told us about it," said Mrs. Tucker, in a low voice that was full of feeling. "He told your father that he had been using him to show a little girl the way to Heaven. And your father said that was queer, since he did not know the way there himself. And then they had a real sober talk. He knows how to do things, Christie. I kind of believe that he will get hold of your father. We must contrive some way to help those Cox children. They ought to be in Sunday-school. I mean to speak to Mrs. Baker about them, when I go in with the sewing. I must try to do that this very afternoon."

Then she folded the little skirt and laid it aside. It would make a very bright strip in the carpet, but she could not afford to use it. "When folks have so little to give," she said, "we must just be saving of the odds and ends."

"Mother," said Christie, "do you think we used the things as Mr. Fletcher meant?"

"I should think we made a beginning, child, and a very good one. If Mr. Keith managed to show Lucy Cox something that she understood about God, why, there is no telling where that will end; and if Mr. Keith has got hold of your father, there is no telling where that will end: I'm pretty sure it will mean a good deal to me; I need him, child. Things are just beginning, and I suppose if it hadn't been for the furniture, they wouldn't have begun."

Just how far this conversation would have reached if there had not been an interruption, I don't know. But it was just at that moment that Christie raised her eyes to the little front window and saw there what made her drop her bag of rags, and her pink spool, and her ball already half-wound, and spring up with an exclamation that, Nettie complained, "woked her baby completely!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EXCITING TIME.

WHAT in the world is the matter now?" said Mrs. Tucker, a trifle sharply, for Christie's sudden start had made her prick her finger, and she looked for a bit of rag to wipe away the drop of blood.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Christie, seeing the drop, "but, mother, Wells Burton's carriage has stopped at the door, and a lady and gentleman, and Wells himself, are getting out, and coming up the walk, and it must be his father and mother."

"For pity's sake!" said Mrs. Tucker, rising too, and beginning to hastily gather her work, "and the front room fire is all out! Pick up the rags, Christie, quick, and don't let them see such a litter as this."

Mrs. Tucker had only had a fire in her front room for a few weeks, but she was already be-

ginning to speak of it as a thing that it was hard to get along without. "It doesn't take long to get used to luxuries and call them necessities," she said almost fretfully. "It does seem a pity, when we have such a nice room."

Christie, too, was almost more fluttered than she had ever been before. The little Tucker house sat back from the road, and there was time to do quite a little talking before the company reached the door.

"Mother," said Christie, "I do wish they wouldn't come. I like Wells, but his mother looks proud, and her dress is all silk and velvet. She will think she must thank me, and I don't know what to say. I don't want any thanks."

Then came the knock.

"Go to the door, child," said Mrs. Tucker, stuffing the last scarlet rag frantically into the bag. "She won't bite you if she is in silk and velvet; and as for her thanks, it is natural enough for her to want to give them, since you saved the life of a boy like Wells."

By this time Christie was at the door.

"Good morning," said Wells. It was he who had knocked. "You did not expect me this morning, did you? I found papa and mamma

at home when I reached there. They came last night, after all. Mamma, this is Christie."

Then he stood back, and Christie found herself taken possession of. A rustle of silk all about her, and herself folded in arms covered with velvet, and her cheeks and eyes and lips showered with kisses, while the tears stood in a pair of motherly eyes.

"My child," she said at last, and her voice reminded Christie of the notes of her piano, "I couldn't write it, and I can't say it. God only knows what you have done for me."

Was this thanks? Christie did not know. It certainly was not what she had expected, and it was very sweet. Mr. Burton pushed his way in, and stood shaking her mother's hand and looking down on her, and saying, "God bless you, madam, for bringing up such a daughter!" and then he turned to Christie, and bent his bearded lips and kissed her, as he might have kissed his daughter.

It was an exciting time. Wells stood apart, smiling, his eyes glistening a little. He had never been able to say much about that narrow escape of his — he had been very anxious to have his father and mother come and say it. The

waiting had seemed long to him — had seemed almost an insult to Christie. Now that they had come, they did not seem to have much to say, but the boy was satisfied. He felt that both father and mother had thanked Christie in a way that she could understand.

Nettie came forward at last, gravely, to get her share of attention. She was used to a good deal of it. Mr. Burton at once took her in his arms and kissed her, and then he kissed the great doll with its wide-open eyes, and it was so plain that he did not know what he was about, that they all laughed. It was wonderful how much less embarrassed everybody felt after that. They all sat down somewhere, Wells bringing a chair from the front room for his father, and before she knew it, Mrs. Tucker was inquiring for the sick son, and telling about a remedy that they used East which she believed might help him.

Of course the whole story of the journey had to be gone over again — how the man in front of Christie came to explain about the ropes, and how she had laughed at the idea of stopping the train, and how she had seen Wells on the platform but a moment before, and then seen him disappear. How she was sure it was Wells, for

Karl had often told her about him, and she had watched him herself many a time.

Then Mrs. Burton told of her anxiety when the train was delayed all day, and of her feeling when they brought Wells up the steps, and how he shouted, "Don't be frightened, mother, it is only a sprain, and I have had a doctor who has almost cured me already."

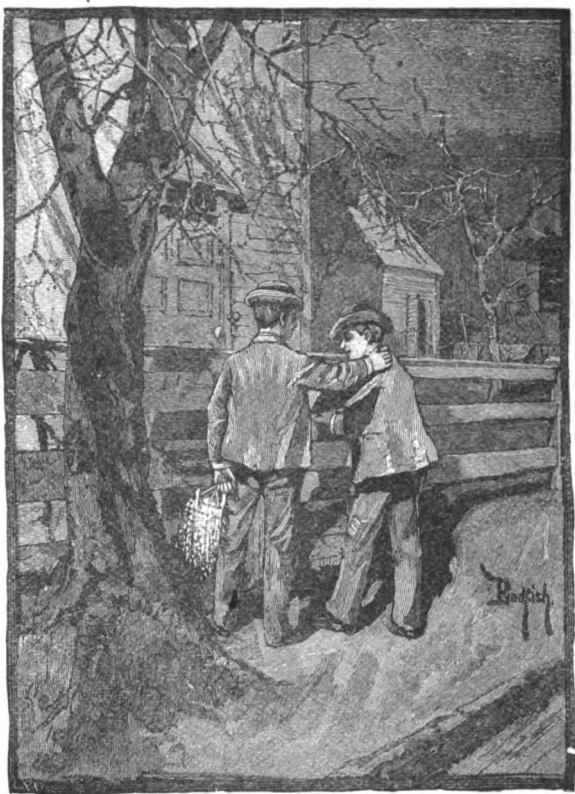
"He told me all about it," she said, "every little thing. How you bathed his ankle and took up a collection of handkerchiefs to bandage it, and then did it so nicely; and really the doctor said if it had been allowed to swell all day, with nothing done for it, it would have been a bad business.

"Oh, I have wanted to come to you every day. And at night, sometimes, when I would get thinking of it, I would almost feel as though I could fly. I would have written, but every day I thought by the next I could surely come out. But my poor boy has been so ill, this is the first time that I could safely leave him, and wind and snow and rain have done what they could to keep Mr. Burton at the West. Oh, it has been a trying time!"

In the midst of all this, Wells slipped away.

Christie wondered afterwards when he went, she did not see him. And Mr. Burton after joining in the talk for a few minutes and finding that Mr. Tucker was in the upper lot, said he would go and see him there, and Christie looking around for Wells, missed him then, and concluded that he had gone ahead, in search of Karl. Meantime, there were some queer noises in the front part of the house. It was like something falling. She looked out of the window, but all she saw was Wells talking with Karl, and she concluded that the latter meant to slip in by the front door, and go through the front room to her bedroom and get his hands washed and his hair in order before he appeared. What could he be tumbling? She hoped it had nothing to do with her dear piano. What if he had tipped over the water pitcher and the new carpet was getting a wetting! She wanted to go and see, but Mrs. Burton was talking eagerly to her, and there was no chance to slip away.

The time passed, and Karl did not come. He must be in dreadful trouble, Christie thought. Neither did Wells, nor his father. She looked out of the window a good deal, but there was nothing to be seen but the Burton carriage being



THE BOYS DO THEIR PLANNING OUTSIDE.

driven up and down to exercise the horses. At last even they went out of sight, for the Tucker house was on a corner where three roads met, and the carriage at last went around the house.

After what seemed to Christie a long time, Mr. Burton came back, bringing her father with him, and then a great deal of the talk had to be gone over, but she could not slip away, for Mrs. Burton had fast hold of her hand all the time; and when she asked her father where Karl was, all he had to say was, "he guessed he was around somewhere," and from time to time came little noises from the front room. At last, Christie decided that Karl had resolved on building a fire so that the guests might get a glimpse of the glories of the front room. After that, she was quiet.

It was not so very long before he appeared, his hair not wonderfully combed, and his face flushed as though he had been taking a good deal of exercise. He sat down, though, without a hint as to a fire in the front room. Wells was behind him and did the talking.

"Mamma, have you asked Mrs. Tucker if she would agree to our plan? Christie, isn't it a nice one? I hope you think so, I do."

"Softly, my son," said Mrs. Burton, smiling, "you go too fast. We had not reached your plan yet. I'll suggest it now, though. Mrs. Tucker, Wells tells me that your young people are not in school."

"No," said Mrs. Tucker, her motherly cheeks growing red. "We are out of the district, you see, and we could not bring it about yet."

"And the school is not a desirable one, I hear. I have grown so nervous over Wells' going in to the city every day that we have made a change and secured a teacher in the house for him, a noble young man who is a friend of the pastor here, Mr. Keith, and most highly recommended by him, and Wells wants Christie and Karl to join him at our house for four hours of hard work every day. Mr. Homer is also a fine musician, and Christie can commence lessons at once on the piano. Wells tells me she has a nice little one of her own. Now, Mr. Tucker, if you will lend your son and daughter to us every day for the next year, we shall really consider it a favor, for Wells does not like to study alone, and there are no young people here that he cares to have with him except Christie and Karl."

What was to be said to such a wonderful sentence as that! I don't wonder that it took even Mrs. Tucker's breath away, and that Mr. Tucker sat silent, his lips working strangely, and his eyes growing too dim to see even how pale Christie had grown, nor how she clutched at her chair as if she were falling. The mother saw it, and drew nearer and put her arm around her girl, while Mr. Tucker tried twice to speak before his voice would obey orders. Then it quivered suspiciously:

"If there is any one thing that their mother and I have coveted for our boy and girl it was a chance to learn, and that we couldn't seem to manage nohow. They are smart, and we knew they were, and we knew if we could give them half a chance they would get along. Their mother has taught them a good deal, and she was a good scholar in her day, but it is all that we could do, and the way out seemed to be getting thicker all the time. And now to have such a chance as this, all of a sudden, it is most too much. I don't know what to say, nor how to say it."

"Don't say anything, my friend," Mr. Burton broke in, "except to relieve this boy's anxiety,"

and here he put his arm around Wells, who had drawn a chair to his side. "He wants to see Karl and Christie in his schoolroom on Monday morning without fail; he worked all yesterday morning getting the study tables and chairs arranged exactly to his mind."

Well, there was more talk, and a little planning. The excitement lessened to the grown people. They had learned to take even astonishment in a calmer way than young blood can. But Christie could distinctly hear the loud thuds of her own heart, and was occupied in wondering some of the time whether it were possible that no one heard it but herself. This thing that had come to her seemed too wonderful for belief. She looked over at Karl, and rubbed her eyes, and wondered if she might not be dreaming. Karl actually looked sober over it.

Not sorrowful, by any means. There was a light in his brown eyes that seemed fairly to dazzle her, but his good strong face was as grave as a man's, and almost seemed to have a man's thought on it. Christie could not help thinking that Karl saw farther even than this wonderful going to school. It was all arranged

in a very short time, considering the interests involved.

They were to begin on Monday at nine o'clock, and work until one; and on two days of the week they were to remain until three, Christie to take a music lesson, and Karl to begin Latin and drawing.

"Of course they will lunch with us on those days," Mrs. Burton said, rising, and buttoning her velvet cloak as she spoke. "We lunch at two, and we shall be only too glad to have young faces about us so often. Wells tells me that Christie is a good walker, but you need not be troubled about her, Mrs. Tucker. Whenever it is in the least unpleasant, the carriage can come for them as well as not, the horses need exercise, and I shall always send them home in it when I think they ought not to walk. Indeed, Wells expects to have his own pony carriage here during the summer, and I presume he will insist on driving them. Oh, don't speak of obligation, Mr. Tucker, don't, you frighten us. Look at Wells, and think what might have been, but for your brave child."

"Even if his life had been spared," added Mr. Burton. And then after a moment he said, in

a low voice, "We have one son who is helpless and a sufferer."

At last they went away. Christie was glad. It seemed to her that she could not have borne it another minute. The moment the door closed after them, she laid her head in her mother's lap and cried as though her heart would break. And the mother smoothed back her hair, and tried to raise her, and said, "Why, what a little goosie she is, to be sure!" But she said it in a queer-sounding voice, and actually plashed a great tear on Christie's nose as she spoke.

When Mr. Tucker came back from seeing his guests to the carriage, he said, "Well, well, well!" And Nettie who began to suspect that she really was not having her share of attention, climbed into his arms and besought him to look at her lovely dolly and not keep winking his eyes so. That made them laugh. Even Christie sat up and laughed, with her face tear-stained. Then the baby in the bedroom lifted up his voice and gave an unmistakable squeal.

"He means to do the crying himself," said the mother, hurrying away, glad, if the truth be told, to hide her face in the baby's neck for a minute.

"Perhaps he's got something to cry for," said the father, "but I don't, for the life of me, see what the rest of us mean. Karl, my boy, are you standing on your head, do you suppose? Everything is getting topsy turvy. How about books, my boy? Can we think up any way to manage them?"

"Karl," said Christie suddenly, "were you in the front room? I thought I heard noises there like something tumbling. What could it have been?"

"Yes," said Karl, giving a quick start toward the door. "I was in there and something tumbled, too. I had a great time. Come in and see."

They rushed away, and Mrs. Tucker, with the baby in her arms, rose up as if to follow them.

"Dear, dear!" she said, "I do hope nothing has happened to her piano. If there has, I don't know what will become of that child. She is getting the most ridiculous notion of fainting! Did you see her when they were here? She turned as white as that tablecloth."

Before Mr. Tucker was ready to answer, they heard a queer little squeal from Christie, and a louder one from Nettie, and then father and mother went to the rescue.

What they saw there was enough to make anybody in his senses squeal a little. The what-not which had stood but an hour before with its rows of empty shelves was filled now from floor to its topmost corner with books. Books bound in red and green and russet brown, and brown and gold and black. How wonderful they looked to Christie, who had all her little life wanted books and never had any to speak of, I cannot even pretend to tell you. She stood in front of the what-not, her hands clasped as if in awe, and her cheeks the color of the red bindings which gleamed down at her. No fear of fainting just then.

"Go and look at them," Karl was saying, just as his father and mother appeared on the scene. "Just you open the covers and take a peep inside. You'll see some fine writing, I can tell you. That boy can write beautifully, and he says he is going to take lessons this term." Karl's eyes added, "So am I," but he wasn't yet ready to trust his voice to say such a wonderful thing as that.

"There's an arithmetic, let me tell you — the latest kind — two of 'em. He said it was awkward, sometimes, for two people to use the same books; and do you see that broad flat book away

down under the what-not? It was too wide for any shelf. That is a geography and atlas — great colored maps, beauties! And there are histories, and stories about the sea and the moon, and oh! I can't tell you! Why don't you go and look at them?" for Christie still stood with clasped hands and swift-coming breath and silent voice.

"Look here," said Mrs. Tucker, seizing hold of Karl, "what is all this about? Where did those books come from, and how did they get in here?"

Karl laughed. "They came out of that box, mother, that lies out there on the stoop. And we put them in the shelves, Wells and I. We had to work like troopers, for we expected every minute that Christie would be rushing in to see what the noise was, though his mother had promised to keep hold of her if she could. A whole armful of them tumbled at once, and it seemed to me that they made a noise like an earthquake. Father, do you see now how we are going to manage about books?"

There were a great many questions to answer, of course, and Karl was willing and ready to answer.

"Why, mother, he says these are his present.

That the going to school part is his mother's plan, and that it isn't a present, because it will be a good deal nicer for him than to study there alone, and that his father and mother say from what they hear of our family they would rather he would be with us than anywhere else, and that he says is just selfishness — it's the nicest kind of selfishness that I ever heard of," and Karl gave a genial laugh — "but that is the way he pretends to look at it, and these books, he says, are his present, given because he wants to give them. A good many of them are from his own library. He says he has had them so long, and read them so much, that he is kind of tired of them and will be glad to have them out of the way. So that is selfish, too, I suppose" — with another laugh — "but, father, did you ever hear the like?"

"No," said Mr. Tucker, speaking slowly, and wiping his forehead with his red handkerchief, "I must say I never did in my life. And there seems to be no end to it, and nothing to say. I've used up about all the language that I ever learned, and still it keeps coming. I'll tell you what it is, my girl, it looks as though that journey which you took to your uncle Daniel's was



BABY TOUCHED THE KEY ONCE.

going to be the greatest trip of your life. Well, well, well!"

When Mr. Tucker said that the family knew that there was nothing more to be expected. Excitement had reached its height and he must have a chance to be quiet.

After a time Christie brought herself to the delight of handling the wonderful books, examining them inside and out. Looking at the illustrations, and the authors' names and the publishers' names; devouring, indeed, everything about them. Not the least interesting part was the story on the fly leaf:

Miss Christie Tucker. From her grateful travelling companion.

Or,

Christie, from Wells.

Or,

For my distinguished Surgeon, in Memory of many Pocket-handkerchiefs.

Miss Christie Tucker — From one who escaped the down train.

These were some of the inscriptions. The boy had exhausted his invention in writing in each some reference to the eventful day when their acquaintance began. The tears which had been

pushed back by excitement were creeping very near the front again, until Christie opened a large, beautifully bound volume of Abbott's delightful history and read on the fly leaf,

Christie—In memory of Sarah Ann.

Then she laughed and the tears went back.

It was Mr. Tucker who finally found his voice again after discovering baby at the piano just as he touched the key once, making it give forth a sound that turned Christie suddenly from her books. "Look here, mother, do you suppose we can any of us do such a kind of every-day thing as to eat some dinner? In case we should want to, how are we going to get it, I wonder? I hear the clock striking twelve."

Whereupon Mrs. Tucker, who had been divided between her attempts to show Nettie the pictures in a book, and to keep baby's eager hands from it, after he had been led away from the music, uttered an exclamation that seemed to mean a great deal to her, and suddenly vanished.

CHAPTER XXII.

LAST OF ALL.

THE last thing that Karl and Christie did that night was to slip into the front room and take a parting look at their treasures. There was no fire in the stove, but both the children felt a glow all through them as they looked about the pretty room and saw the gleam of the piano keys, and the bright colors of the wonderful books.

"I feel as though I wanted to scream," said Christie. "I would shout right out now, if father and mother wouldn't hear me and be scared. What does make you so sober, Karl? I have noticed you all day."

"Don't I look glad?" asked Karl, stooping over to straighten a book that was tipping.

"Yes, you do, but you look sober, too. There is a new look, somehow; I never saw it on your face before."

"It never was there before," he said, speaking with a sort of cheerful gravity. "I've made up my mind to one thing, Christie, and I guess it makes a difference with looks and everything; it does with feelings, I know. I'm going to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. I settled it this morning, early. In fact I am a servant now. I have belonged to him all day, and I like it."

"Oh!" said Christie, drawing a long breath and making a low, sweet sound of pleasure after it, in a way that cannot be put on paper; "that is the very best thing yet of all these best times. Karl, I'm too glad to tell you anything about it. You will have to guess how glad I am. Won't you tell me all about it? How came you to decide?"

"Well," said Karl, setting the lamp on the little table, and turning so that he could look into Christie's eyes, "it is all mixed up with these things. I don't suppose I could tell you how much I have wanted to go to school and learn, and have you learn, and have books and things. I meant to do it, some day, but once in awhile I got in a hurry and could not see how it was ever going to be done, and I would

feel as though it was too bad, anyhow. Sometimes when you would talk about these things I would think that if God thought as much of us as you said, he would plan a way for us to go to school and learn. I said once that if I could have books like other boys, I would be ready to belong to Jesus and work for him too. I felt dreadfully that day you went to uncle Daniel's. I wanted you to go, you know, I wouldn't have had you miss it for anything, and yet I kept thinking that the money it took would have bought us a geography, and what good would the going there just for a day do? Then, when you came home and had such wonderful things to tell, something seemed to say to me that God knew all about it, and sent you there to save Wells Burton's life, and take care of that baby. And I thought maybe he knew all about everything, and was planning for us. Then the things began to come, and the more they came, the more astonished I was, and I began to feel as though it was almost certain that God was doing it. Only I couldn't understand how it was going to help about the books and the school. Then last night Wells told me he had some books for you. I was so

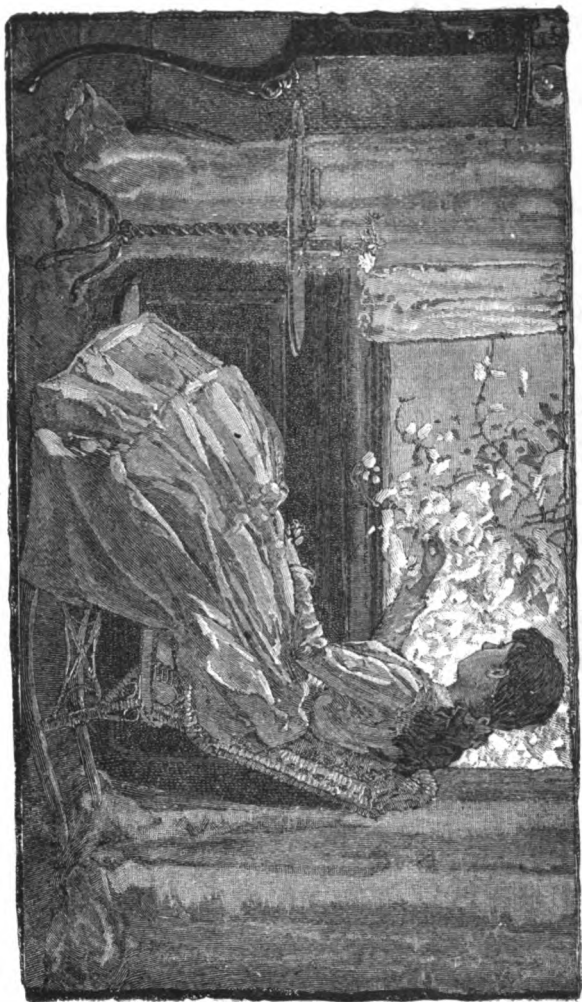
astonished, after all, to think that God really was going to send *books*, that I didn't answer a word to Wells. He did all the planning about getting them in slyly, and I kept still. But I couldn't get to sleep for a long time last night; this morning I got up before it was light, and I made up my mind, whatever the books were, whether there was a geography or not, God was doing it all, and I would belong to him and serve him. Yes, sir," said Karl, in excitement, bringing his strong little fist down on the table, "I said I would, whether I ever went to school a day in my life! And here this morning there came two geographies and two arithmetics, and the school and all! I never saw anything like it!" And here Karl who had not let even Christie see him cry for more than a year, dashed off two tears and choked back several more.

The door leading from the kitchen into the hall opened, and they heard their mother's voice:

"Children, are you standing in that cold room yet? You do beat all! Go right away to bed. The books won't run away before morning, nor the piano either, you may depend on that."

Wells was standing on the piazza steps the

WILLIS BURTON'S SISTER.



next Monday morning waiting to show the new scholars to the schoolroom. They came in ample time, their cheeks rosy with the hasty walk, the excitement, or both. They looked very neat and trim. Christie in her travelling dress, which her mother had concluded might be worn for the first day or two, and Karl in a neat jacket made out of his father's old coat. Under his arm he carried what was worth more to him than all the new jackets in the country — the two arithmetics and the two geographies.

“Here we are!” said Wells, gleefully opening the schoolroom door.

It was a long room, built quite at the end of the large old house, and had a piazza running its entire length, with three glass doors opening from it into the schoolroom. Framed in two of these doors stood Christie and Karl and looked about them in silent delight, not unmingled with awe.

A carpet of mossy green covered the floor. At one end was a blackboard, at the other a history chart, and all the spaces between were filled with maps; larger maps than these two had ever seen before. The long, wide centre-table was strewn with books and writing-materials, and had cunning rows of drawers — a set for each of them,

as Wells explained. There were three large chairs of just the right height for the table, and into one of these Christie presently sank, with clasped hands and a look of such unutterable satisfaction on her face that Wells burst into hearty laughter.

"I hope you'll like," he said, as soon as he could speak; "I hope you'll like everything. I fixed up things just to my fancy; mamma laughed at some of my notions, but I was sure you would like them. Don't you think, for instance, that those globes look better over on that green table where a fellow can get a chance at them, than they do perched on those upper shelves?"

"Everything looks perfectly lovely," declared Christie, and her eyes were on the cottage piano which occupied an alcove. Wells' eyes followed hers.

"Yes, that's my piano. It has a good tone, I think; see if it hasn't!" and he seated himself before it and ran his fingers over the keys in a way which made the blood tingle in Christie's finger-tips.

He laughed at the look in her eyes.

"You can play better than that in a little while, I presume. I have no talent for it. I

just do it by hard drumming. O Christie, what do you think ! The Seaside Library woman has been heard from ! — Fact ! ” he added, as Christie’s astonished, not to say shocked eyes were raised to his. “ She wrote a long letter and tried to smooth over what she had done. She said she had been miserable ; I think she ought to have been, don’t you ? Mamma thinks she must be very much changed, and I should hope she was, since that day we met her on the cars. She sent a message to you ; what do you think of that ? Said she had reason to thank you. She did not say for what, but I suppose it was the seed cakes.”

There was a gleam of fun in his handsome face, but it sobered again as he said : “ I suppose I ought to be glad that she is trying to behave better, but you see I don’t think I like anything about her.”

“ *I am glad,*” said Christie, her eyes shining. “ She knew she had been doing what was wrong, and that was what made her so cross and disagreeable. Don’t you know when you have done something wrong it makes you feel cross ? ”

Wells had no answer to this but a laugh, and a wise nod over at Karl. He did not choose to confess how he felt when he knew he had done

wrong. The entrance of the professor interrupted the talk, and set the schoolroom into a buzz of work.

Many interesting things have happened to Karl and Christie since that time, but neither of them will ever forget that first wonderful day at school.

There was somebody else who had reason to remember this day. It was just at its close that Mrs. Burton called Christie to her room and began to question about the Cox children. How old were they? Of what size? What did they need in the way of clothing? Christie described them as well as she could, and blushed over the question as to what they needed.

"I think they need most everything, ma'am," she said hesitatingly. "I don't feel quite sure what they need worst; they don't seem to have anything."

"There are two suits of Well's outgrown clothes which would probably do for the boy," Mrs. Burton said thoughtfully, "but I don't know about the little girl. Estelle's clothes would hardly be suitable for her. Still, there are several good strong dresses which might be

made over; well, I'll see what can be done. I think we will drive out there this afternoon and call on them, you and I, and perhaps your mother would go with us and see just what they need most."

Christie's eyes were beautiful just then.

"Mother will go, ma'am," she said with great eagerness. "She knows all about everything, and she feels ever so sorry for the Cox family. I will take care of Nettie and the baby and let her go. She knows how to help."

"Very well," Mrs. Burton said, smiling kindly on her. In her own mind she believed that Christie too "knew how to help," but it was very pleasant to see how wise the womanly little girl thought her mother to be.

Christie was full of the scheme when she reached home. It was the first thing she talked about after she opened the door.

"O, mother, Mrs. Burton is coming in the carriage at four o'clock, and she says will you go with her to see Mrs. Cox and find out what they need most? She is going to fix Lucius and Lucy up so they can go to school, and to church, and everything. O mother, isn't it splendid!"

"Me go with her in the carriage!" repeated

Mrs. Tucker; "bless my heart! what does she want of me?"

But she went. Christie stood at the window with the baby in her arms, and watched with intense satisfaction while Karl helped his mother into the carriage precisely as he had seen Wells do to his mother a few days before

They were gone until nearly dark, and Mrs. Tucker came home with a satisfied air; much had been accomplished.

"They are fixed out finely, now, specially Lucius," she said, nodding her head at Karl and Christie, but meaning the Cox children. "You two will have as much as you can do not to envy them, I guess. Well's outgrown suit fits Lucius as well as though it was made for him, and Lucy's doesn't want much fixing, though Mrs. Burton says her Estelle wore it when she was fourteen. She must be a delicate girl. Lucy is really a very pretty child when she gets dressed up. She put a blue flannel suit on her, and it made her look like a lady. Her mother just broke down and cried; but that didn't last long. The next thing she did was to begin to sweep the room; and I thought that was a better sign than the crying."

"Sweeping the room while you and Mrs. Burton were there!" exclaimed Christie, aghast. That sort of politeness was not in keeping with her mother's usual teachings.

"Yes, while we were there; and I was glad to see it too. That poor woman hasn't had the heart to sweep her room this long time, and I was afraid she had lost all care as to how things looked. It did me good to see her start up and begin to pick up things and sweep. The sweeping didn't last long. She said she forgot, for a minute, but she did not notice that things were so bad; that is just it, she has been too discouraged to notice. Now that Mrs. Burton has put a little heart into her, she will wake up and try again, I do believe. That is a good woman, Christie. There is a difference in rich people as well as in poor ones."

"Mother, do you think she is a Christian?"

"No," said Mrs. Tucker, in a low voice, "I know she isn't — she said so; but I guess she wants to be, and I can't help hoping that she is going to be."

"Mother," said Christie softly, after a few minutes of quiet, "don't you think the furniture, and other things, are beginning to work a

little bit in the way the old gentleman said he wanted them to?"

"I guess they are, child; I know they are setting me to thinking."

Saturday it rained. If it had not been for that, Christie was to have gone to the depot with Karl when he took in the Saturday night's extra supply of milk. As it was, she stayed at home and watched for him with no little eagerness. The truth was, she was to have a new pair of gloves for Sunday, and Karl had had very careful directions about picking them out. She did hope he wouldn't make a mistake. He was later than usual. She began to fear that it had grown too dark for him to select the right shade.

"Did you get them?" was the first question she asked, as at last he opened the door. You see, when a girl has as few new things as our Christie, a pair of lisle thread gloves, at twenty cents, becomes a matter of great importance.

"Yes," said Karl, "I got them, and I guess they are the right shade, for Wells picked them out. He says he knows they are all right."

"Wells!" said Christie, with a little start. "How came he to?"



MRS. BURTON PUT A LITTLE HEART INTO HER.

"Why, he offered to do it while I went over to the office, and I knew he understood how to do such things; he does them for his sister. He was waiting for her. She came in on the train. She is a beauty, Christie. But I got a good deal more than gloves. Something for you. I never did see the beat."

"What is it?" asked Christie, sitting down in the nearest chair. "If anything more comes to me, Karl Tucker, I shall give up!"

"Well, something has. A letter, for one thing, and a little bit of a white box for another. Just as I was coming out of the post-office, Hal Parsons called me.— He is the one who was along that day and helped with the piano.— 'Halloo!' he said. 'Does Miss Christie Tucker live out your way now, or don't you know her?' Then they all laughed. Those fellows never will get over laughing at me about that time when I said I didn't know any such person. Well, I told him I had made her acquaintance lately, and then Hal said I had better step in and look after her property. And there was an express package for you."

"An express package!" repeated Christie, her cheeks glowing. "What is that?"

“Oh, it comes by express—on the cars—you know. A man has to go along and take care of the things, and see that they get safely



“FIXED FINE, SPECIALLY LUCIUS.”

to the express office. Then you have to sign your name, and the clerk gives the package to you. There was nothing to pay. Here it is.

What a speck of a thing to send by express ! ”

Christie took the small white package bearing her name and looked at it eagerly.

“What can it be ? ” she said, a great deal of suppressed excitement in her voice.

“It can’t be a piano,” Karl said, laughing. “Nor a sewing machine, nor a rocking chair, nor even a book. It is too little for anything.”

“Oh, no,” said Christie ; “ever so many nice things are small. Don’t you know that locket which Mrs. Burton wears on her chain, what a tiny thing it is ; I suppose it cost a great deal of money. But of course this isn’t a locket.”

“Open it, Christie, and let’s see what it is.”

But Christie turned away and laid it resolutely down on the supper table.

“No, let’s keep it until father comes in and we are all ready to sit down. Then we’ll have the nice time all together. We have a treat for to-night, Karl. Little bits of soda biscuit, and the nicest maple syrup you ever saw. Mrs. Burton sent us a pail full since you have been gone. And oh ! Karl. Dennis had a real load of things for the Coxes — meat, and a sack of flour, and some butter, and I don’t know what all. Won’t they have a nice Sunday ? ”

"Going to keep the letter too?" Karl asked. "Well, then, I'm off. Hurry up your biscuit; father and I will be in in five minutes."

Ten minutes more of pleasant bustle and then baby was tied in his high chair, and Nettie climbed into hers, and the happy family gathered about their table.

"Now for the letter," said Father Tucker, as he tucked away a nice biscuit. "Will your supper keep, my girl, while you read it out?"

Christie thought it would, and with her clean knife dexterously made an opening and drew out the neat sheet of very handsome note paper, written in a man's hand.

"O, Karl," she said in admiration, "what beautiful writing! I want you to learn to write just like it."

"All right," said Karl cheerily. "Of course I can, as well as not. I'll attend to it to-morrow." Then the reading began.

DEAR LITTLE SUNSHINE :

I cannot help calling you so, because on that long, long rainy day which we spent together, you were the only ray of sunshine to be seen anywhere, and you shone steadily and patiently all day, and reached right into my heart, which I

thought was too sad and gloomy ever to get into sunshine again. Do you remember me, I wonder? And the number of times I looked at my watch, and how you laughed at me—a sweet, bright little laugh—and then how gently you apologized for doing what was no harm at all? Oh, I remember every little thing you said and did that day. I had nothing else to do, and I cannot help thinking that your sunshine had a great deal to do with helping me keep my senses, and your praying did, I believe, great things for me.

Do you remember my promise, little woman? I was to write you a letter—

[“Oh,” said Christie, looking up, “he did say he would, but I thought he would forget all about it. He promised to tell me—well, I’ll read on. Oh, dear, I hope it did do some good, though I don’t see how it could!”]

Then she read:

If our five hours’ stop in the rain and the mud did any possible good to my friend, in any way, I was to tell you of it. Remember? Well, now, I have a wonderful story to tell you. There was a great physician whom I happened to know was travelling that day, and would take a train at Brightwood Junction about noon, for his home in a far-away city. My plan was to get to the city in time to connect with the Brightwood cars, and get out there before the noon train would leave, and beseech that doctor to go on with me, and try

to do something for my friend. This was my plan. But it so happened that nothing of this was true. The great doctor did not go to Brightwood Junction at all, as I had been telegraphed that he would. At the last minute he changed his mind and went to the city to get the East-bound train on the Wabash railroad. But the same storm which made trouble for us worked mischief on the Wabash road, and there that doctor sat and waited, and hoped that the train would leave. Pretty soon came into the depot a man, a friend of mine, who had been waiting at our depot for two hours for me, and then gone around to the Wabash depot in the hope that I might have come that way. The first person he saw was this doctor, whom I had telegraphed him I was going to try to bring with me. He rushed up to him and told his eager story, and the doctor went away with him to my friend's sick room. When I reached there at night, the great doctor had just gone, having stayed with her all day, and done for her what he hoped would save her life. Now, little friend, let me stop right here and say with all my heart, Thank God! and next to him, thank you, for your faith and your prayers. It would take a great deal to convince me that your praying all that day had not a great deal to do with the strange providences that led us all. For see! Suppose I had been able to carry out my plans: I should have gone as fast as I could to Bright-

wood Junction and so missed the doctor entirely. Or suppose I had appeared at the depot on the train which my friend expected, then he would not have gone to the other depot at all, and in that way we would have missed him. Dear little Sunshine, he is a wonderful God. I know you will be glad to hear that I have learned to pray. I got down on my knees that night, and told him that I would serve him forever, and I thanked him for overturning my foolish plans, and carrying out his own that day. I wonder how many more things were accomplished by that rain storm? Wouldn't you like to have the story of that day written out for you? And now, my little woman, I have taken the first leisure moment in which to write you. There has been a great deal to do, and you see my letter comes from a long way off. I was married ten days ago to the friend whose life was saved that Christmas day, and I carried her away at once for change of air. She is growing strong and well. In a little box which you will find at the express office, there is a wedding present for you to help you to keep in mind the time when you laughed and prayed a soul out of sore trouble. My wife sends her love to you, and says kiss baby twice — for us both. Write and tell me how often you look at my wedding present.

Yours, for Christ and Heaven,

LEONARD RAMSEY.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Tucker.

"I should think as much!" said Mr. Tucker.

"Pooh! pooh!" said the baby, but he did not mean any disrespect. He was simply trying to blow out the light. As for Karl, he pushed the package toward Christie and said in unusual excitement:

"Open it, quick! I most guess what it is."

"What!" said Christie, and "What?" said Nettie, her eyes bright with expectation.

"I'm not going to tell; open it, quick!"

So amid silence, except from the baby who gravely and steadily pursued his scientific project, the seal of the package was broken. It showed a small white box, with a string tied around it. The string was cut and the lid lifted. It showed simply a puff of white cotton! Then Karl seized the box and held it to his ear.

"I knew it!" he said in intense excitement.

"It is alive."

Christie's face was growing pale. She took back the box and pushed away the cotton. Certainly it was alive, and it spoke very distinctly too.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock!" was what it said.

"Do for pity's sake lift it up," said Mrs.

Tucker, and Christie lifted it up. A small gleaming gold watch, which despite its journey from the city, was steadily engaged at its work saying "Tick-tock, tick-tock!"

Don't expect me to tell you what any of them said or did for the next half-hour, for really I cannot do it.

"Well," said Karl, drawing a long breath when the excitement was somewhat abated, "I know one thing, I know I was never so glad of anything in my life as that I stayed at home Christmas and you went to uncle Daniel's."

"But I didn't go!" said Christie, bursting into laughter.

Then they all laughed.

